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M O R A L
DISCOURSES
O N
P R O V I D E N C E

AND OTHER IMPORTANT
S U B J E C T S.

By THOMAS HUNTER, M.A.
VICAR of WEAVERHAM in CHESHIRE.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

W A R R I N G T O N :

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MDCCLXXIV.



TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,
W I L L I A M,
LORD BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER;

MY LORD,

A Writer whose situation and circumstances have deprived him of all hopes and fears in respect to this world, has this among other advantages, that his sincerity cannot well be called in question; and he may express his respect and gratitude to his patrons and protectors in the warmest terms without incurring

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the suspicion of design or flattery. And yet it must be confessed that an address to Bishop WARBURTON is not an easy part: the singularity, the dignity, the greatness of the character strike us with awe and reverence; and a retreat from a presence which confounds us with our own insignificance might be thought most prudent, did not the experience of your Lordship's goodness and distinguished humanity dissipate our fears and invite our approach.

A WORK that would claim your Lordship's approbation and patronage should be bold and original in the plan, manly and spirited in the execution,

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execution, adorned with all the graces of nature and the accomplishments of art, distinguished by a fire of imagination and flow of eloquence, joined to a critical acumen and a logical precision on subjects the most barren and abstracted: the author should discover a comprehensive knowledge of the immense fund of human error, and the wide range of human science, should be an universal scholar, intimate with the philosophy, the religion, the learning, the laws, the manners and customs civil as well as sacred of the several ages and nations of the world: able with a glance to penetrate what is most obscure, to unveil what is most mysterious, to detect

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teet what is fallacious, to resolve and reduce to order what is most intricate and perplexed ; and to exhibit, as occasion might require, the refinement, the sublimity and beauty of sentiment which distinguish the lettered sages, the poets, the philosophers, the legislators of ancient Syria, of Egypt, Greece and Rome. But the author of these discourses, tho' pretending to no such literary merit has been countenanced by your notice, and honoured with repeated instances of your Lordship's humanity.

IF, as some fanatical casuists would seem to say, all desire of the approbation of the wise and good,
all

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all aspiration to virtue and praise, to whatsoever things are lovely and of good report is immoral and anti-christian ; I confess myself a criminal on this occasion, and must not dissemble it that I esteem the experience which I have had of Bishop WARBURTON's benevolence as one of the most flattering circumstances of my life.

It were perhaps good policy and prudence, if no duty, in the great sometimes to condescend and assort with the sequestered and humble tenant of the shade, and to borrow that reputation by countenancing the character of others to which they have no title from any display
of

viii DEDICATION.

of their own. By such a conduct they would allay the murmurs of discontent, blunt the poisoned shafts of malignity and envy, and reconcile mankind to some respect for their unwieldy wealth and worthless splendor. Your condescension, my Lord, derives from a different source, and may seem the effect of a native generosity or a divine principle. It is open, generous, communicative, friendly and sincere ; and the master of all the genius, and erudition that may challenge the esteem and applause of mankind, you condescend with that ease and familiarity to the address and attempts of those who are below you, as if you expected nothing, possessed nothing, and
knew

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knew nothing of yourself and by yourself.

HUMILITY we expect as suitable to the condition of low life, and are not surprized to find the manners of men in some degree influenced by their fortune. They can depart from nothing who are possessed of nothing, nor can they easily descend who are already in the lowest rank and order of mankind. But when Genius, which gives the most legitimate title to the first, to more than imperial honours, divests itself of its superiority, and descends from its elevated sphere to equal or to prefer others to itself, and to impart of its fame and reputation

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tation by a friendly communication with and condescension to men of low degree, we are charmed with the beauty and loveliness of such exalted, such humble virtue, and rejoice in the benignity, the warmth and splendor derived to us from an orb revolving at so immense a distance above us.

YOUR Lordship, like the first luminary in our system, may communicate without diminution, or fear of losing any of your own fullness and lustre. Yet as the masters in arts and science, like conquerors in arms, have not been without their jealousy and ambition, their fears and hatred of rivals, your
Lordship's

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Lordship's generosity of spirit is the more extraordinary and the more to be admired as contravening the general course of nature and the usual working of the human passions. We see fortune, power, place and titles rearing their heads aloft, and treating with sovereign contempt all those whom they deem below them. How beautiful then is Wisdom, the prime of all human excellencies and distinctions, when resigning or foregoing its prerogatives, it stoops to converse as it were upon the level with the ignorant and unlettered !

NOR is your Lordship's character and reputation diminished by such
benign

xii DEDICATION.

benign deportment towards your inferiors; nor does the eminence of the scholar or the elevation of the Prelate lose any degree of superiority by the instances of your humanity as a man, and of your benevolence as a christian. We are rather the more captivated with so much greatness tempered with so much goodness, with an union, not common in nature, of erudition and humility, and so distinguished an example of that charity which excelleth knowledge. Those who stand nearest to your person, or have had occasional intercourse with the Bishop of GLOUCESTER, can only do justice to your Lordship's private character. I have known
the

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the man who sat down at the same table a bigot and an enemy to Dr. Warburton, rise a fond admirer, and professed defender of the Author of the DIVINE LEGATION. Our vanity is flattered by your Lordship's notice. The most insignificant acquire consideration in the eye of the public from Bishop Warburton's regard. Your approbation alone, my Lord, is fame; is more than place and dignity, than wealth or title, than the voice of the senate and people, than the interest of the minister or the favour of the prince.

A GREATER instance of your Lordship's condescension cannot well be produced, than that the author
of

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of these sheets has had your Lordship's countenance, and is permitted the honour of this address.

I am,

My LORD,

Your Lordship's

most devoted,

and

most obliged Servant,

THOMAS HUNTER.

P R E F A C E.

IF method, connection and proportion are not always observed ; if some repetitions are admitted in the following discourses, the candid reader will ascribe it to the Author's inability to direct his hand and review his pieces : besides a sameness of sentiment is naturally contracted by dwelling long on the same subject, and the same arguments are sometimes not only proper but necessary in answer to different objections. He hopes therefore that the sincerity of his views, with the truth and importance of his principles will atone for less defects in form and mode.

If these discourses meet with a favourable reception, the author may possibly trouble the public with some future Essays on the subject of Providence in answer to the most
plausible

xvi P R E F A C E.

plausible objections that have been urged against it by the sceptics of our days.

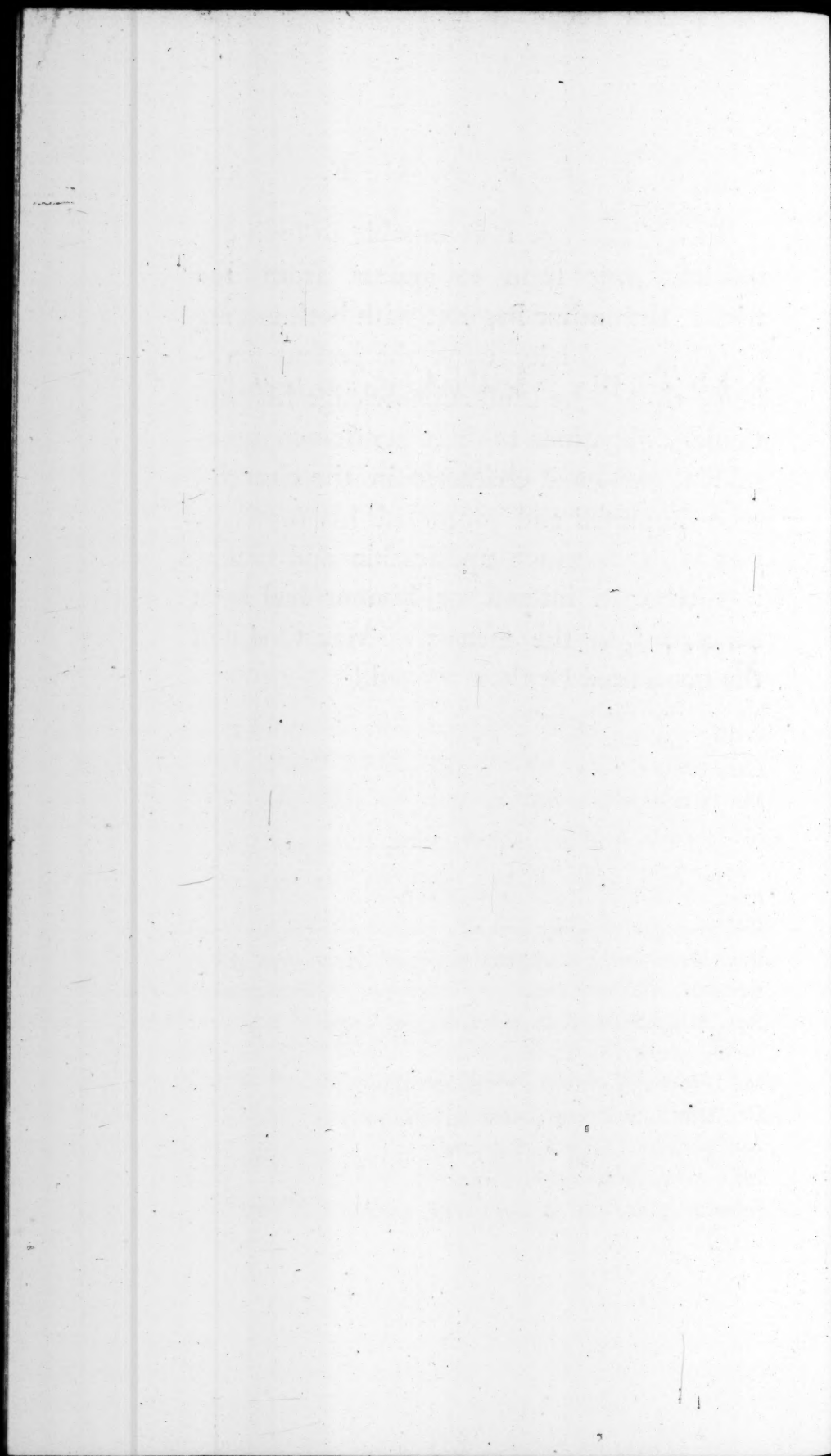
MODERN scepticism arises not like the ancient from real facts, or real distress, and the agony of perplexing thought, or the appearances of things in nature, but from subtilty of head, a misapplication of language, or an abuse of logic. It is learned, or rather laboured, refined and metaphysical; and no small degree of attention is required to apprehend the sense intended to be conveyed; and when apprehended, it rather confounds than convinces you: You find yourself imposed upon by a fallacy which you cannot at first sight detect, and involved in a labyrinth whose mazes perplex and threaten you with endless error.

THE discussion of such subtilties seemed not to belong to plain and popular Discourses intended for common use, and may more properly fall under some future examination.

THAT

P R E F A C E. xvii

THAT the age is favourable to such enquiries, may seem to appear from the friends the author has met with both among the clergy and laity upon the present occasion; though he must acknowledge his particular obligations to some gentlemen of eminent name and character in the church; who supported and promoted his subscription with as much application and zeal as if their own interest or honour had been concerned in the success. May God and the good deed be their reward!



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*The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and
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happy who deal very treacherously?*

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*And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him,
and said unto him, The Lord is with thee,
thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon
said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be
with us, why then is all this befallen us?
And where be all his miracles which our
fathers*

C O N T E N T S.

fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

DISCOURSES XIV. XV. XVI. XVII. XVIII.

Considerations drawn from the Process of Nature in Proof and Illustration of the Doctrine of Providence.

P. 361. 375. 395. 417. 435.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

There

C O N T E N T S.

There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body: and so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual.

E R R A T A.

V o L. I.

Page 17, line 7, *for* reserved *read* reversed.

22, 13, *for* carried *read* carried on.

118, 5, *for* do *read* does.

126, 7, *for* around *read* rounded.

242, 20, *for* his Character *read* the Character of the Criminal.

244, 12, *for* prescribed *read* proscribed.

263, 14, *for* virtuous *read* wicked.

V o L. II.

Page 15, line 5, *for* vain *read* main.

31, 18, *for* gloffing *read* glozing.

244, 2, *for* note *read* vote.

451, 9, *for* fashional *read* fashionable.

475, 12, *for* call *read* called.

DISCOURSE I.

PSALMS cxlv. 17.

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and hely
in all his works.*

OF all the monsters, which the pride of scepticism, and the folly of infidelity have produced in these latter days, there is not one perhaps that shocks more both for its novelty, absurdity and impiety, than that of those

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B

who

who admit the existence of God, yet deny his Providence; or, admitting his natural attributes of wisdom and power, deny the moral, that is, his goodness, righteousness, holiness and truth. Nothing in fact can seem more paradoxical: for common sense or the easiest deductions of reason should seem to suggest, that moral attributes, which are of the highest order of perfection, must necessarily or properly belong to the most perfect Being; for if we conceive aright, or with any propriety at all of God, we must ascribe to him all possible, all conceivable perfection, and after all our most exalted ideas of him, we must fall greatly short of his real and infinite excellencies. Now, can we conceive it at all agreeable to these excellencies and perfections, to make him, the God of matter and motion, and at the same time deny his moral kingdom, and respect to man and morals? Do we thus judge in estimating the character and perfections of other Beings, with whom we are acquainted; and of
whose

DISCOURSE I. 3

whose perfections we have conceived any adequate ideas ?

LET us give to those gods among men, the princes and kings of the earth, a power and wisdom the most exquisite and extensive ; let them be able to stifle sedition, to quell rebellion, to raise or rout armies with a nod ; let their political sagacity be such, that with the suggestion of a thought, they can defeat all attempts to shake the stability of their throne, and to check the extent of their empire : let Solomon have wisdom and largeness of heart like the sand that is upon the sea shore ; “ let Saul slay his thousands, and David his ten thousands ” yet after all, let us suppose these princes, their policy and power directed to no moral end, and exercised in promoting no interest, virtue or happiness of their subjects ; and shall we admit and admire such excellencies and characters, as of the highest order of perfection ? Or, will reason hesitate a moment,

to which to give the preference, to a Cato, or a Cataline, to a Domitian, or a Titus?

AGAIN, let the character of the Messiah, and Son of God, to which the same men have objected, who object to the moral attributes, be supposed of a different form and feature to what is represented in the gospel; let the Son have been, what they maintain the Father to be, the wisdom of God, and the power of God, abstracted from and void of all moral excellencies and perfections; let Christ, instead of the lessons of moral truth and righteousness, instead of divine moral perfections, and the prospect of life and immortality, have given mankind a system of natural philosophy, and a demonstration of the mechanical laws of the universe, in which the Divine Wisdom and Power alone were manifested; for the power which Christ exerted in healing the sick, feeding the hungry, giving sight to the blind, and life to the dead, let him have levelled the mountains, and overwhelm-
ed

ed cities and kingdoms in earthquakes, or fire from heaven ; let him have commanded the sea to retire, and the sun to stand still ; or let him have desolated the earth with flood, famine, or pestilence ; would he have hereby more approved himself, to these objectors, as the Son of God, and appeared more worthy of their faith and acceptance ?

OF all the paradoxes that were ever published to the world, there was perhaps never a more bold or absurd one, than this under consideration ; by which wisdom and power, which may be allowed the prerogatives of a tyrant or a demon, are made the only attributes of the God-head ; and righteousness, goodness and mercy, which we allow to be the highest moral excellencies and perfections, should have no place in the most excellent and perfect Being. A God disposed to the work of creation, and disposed to neglect the work of his own hands ; a God intent upon the regulation of matter and motion, but careless of the morals and happiness of his rational creatures, should

B 3

seem

6 DISCOURSE I.

seem only fitted for such, in whom practice and principle have conspired to extinguish both the light of reason, and the duties and comforts of religion.

YET our new philosophers would not be thought void of reasoning; they lay claim to the first philosophy; and appeal to fact and experience, and the phænomena of nature for the proof and confirmation of their doctrines; and maintain as strenuously, as if the salvation of mankind was concerned in the affirmative on their side of the question, that righteousness belongeth not to God, and that there is no knowledge, or regard of human actions in the Most High.

To confute this impious, and I will add, unphilosophical tenet, we shall join issue with the defenders of it, and appeal to fact, to experience, and the history of mankind, for the decision of this important subject, the moral attributes of God. We further
agree

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7

agree with our adversaries in arguing on this point from the will of God, as established and manifested in the laws and course of nature; and hope not only to maintain, but to demonstrate, that this course and these laws, as they affect mankind, are the strongest evidence of the moral character of their founder and executor.

MAN as a free, a rational and moral agent, must be the subject, whom the attributes and dispensations of God, supposing him a moral governor, must principally affect: and the disposition of inferior natures respecting him, must wear that moral aspect, and have that moral tendency and operation, as shew the great Disposer and Author of them to have been acted and influenced by moral motives in their original formation, and in the force and efficiency they have ever since preserved. The history of mankind then, as they are and have been affected in their fortunes and happiness by vice or virtue,

B 4

by

by their piety or impiety, is that volume which we are to consult on this subject : and if we find it universally or generally true, that the same event happeneth “to the righteous
“and to the wicked, to him that sacrificeth,
“and to him that sacrificeth not,” we may, we must give up the cause of God, as a moral Governor of the world : for we may say on this, as the patriarch did on a former occasion ; “that be far from thee to do after this
“manner, to slay the righteous with the
“wicked ; and that the righteous should be
“as the wicked ; that be far from thee ;
“shall not the judge of all the earth do
“right ?”

AND here we might deduce in the way of reasoning, the moral character of God, as established in the nature of things, from the fortune of individuals, as it is affected by their moral character and conduct ; for are not the vicious generally unhappy ? And unhappy in consequence of their vices ?

And

And is not the general misery of mankind regularly deducible from their immorality, as any other effect from its proper cause ?

It might be shewn, that fraud and bad arts, sloth and luxury, intemperance and debauch, envy and malice, avarice and ambition, do naturally, and in the common course of things generally impair, and sometimes entirely destroy the honour and character, the fortune, the health, the peace of conscience and serenity of soul of those who entertain and practise them. That multiplied vice is only aggravated misery ; that the greatest sinners are, and generally have been the greatest sufferers ; and that in respect to the intrinsic and most valuable blessings of life, nature clearly assigns them to virtue and her votaries.

If vice and immorality are thus prejudicial in their effects to the persons, the property, the character and happiness of individuals, they cannot have a more friendly influence

influence, or prove more propitious to mankind, when multiplied and united in society; but like a complication of bad humours in the same body, must conspire to inflame or corrupt the whole mass, and to heighten the malignity of its disorders: and as certainly as "God is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works," he can no more tolerate vice and impiety in general bodies than in individuals: and "though hand join hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Sin appearing more exceeding sinful by the number of offenders, bidding as it were open defiance to the Majesty of heaven, must draw down upon itself more severe and signal vengeance, in vindication of the Divine Attributes, and be an example of terror, and a lesson of repentance to beholders.

Thus we might reason abstractedly, and confirm our reasoning by numerous examples of such vengeance taken upon sinners, upon God's own people in particular, and
other

other neighbouring nations, whose history is contained or referred to in the old testament. But this is an authority, which our adversary, the unbeliever is not disposed to admit: we therefore insist not upon it for the present, and are content to appeal to the testimony of civil history, whose authenticity cannot be disputed, and whose partiality will not be objected. As God is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever, vice and impiety must be alike odious to him at all times, in the same circumstances; and we shall not fail to observe the same manifestations of his righteous attributes, and of his detestation of sin, in the history of other ages and nations, as well as in that of the Jews; the history of the world from its commencement to its consummation will be seen in the best light, and studied to the most advantage, when it is considered as the history of God's attributes and dispensations, manifested in the government of his creatures in general, and of mankind in particular. The volume is indeed large, and

too

too complicated as well as too extensive, for the understanding of man to comprehend the whole ; yet the strong lines and striking characters of eternal power and God-head must be legible, as certainly as they have a place in the world ; and the divine moral attributes, truth, righteousness, and holiness, as of most importance to the virtue and happiness of mankind, must be no less conspicuous than the natural, that is, the Divine Wisdom and Power. Nay, if we reflect on the effects of power and wisdom, visible as they are in the creation, we should scarce allow them for Divine, or ascribe them to the supreme Being but that we see them subservient to the best ends, and promoting the good, both natural and moral, the virtue, the interests, the piety and happiness of mankind.

LET us suppose the present universe a mere mechanical system, and the phenomena so many portentous exhibitions of power without goodness, and of wisdom without

without use, alarming in their appearance, and pernicious in their influence, should we have acknowledged or adored the supreme, all-perfect Being? Though in his hand were "all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills were his also;" yet had he not given "food to all flesh, and did not the vallies laugh and sing;" should we have had sufficient conviction, that God in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and that the heavens were the work of his hands? Were wisdom and power the only attributes of Deity, we might expect in the course of the moral world, an equal distribution of peace and prosperity, of health and happiness to the righteous and to the wicked; and that cities and kingdoms would have grown great, rich and powerful no less by fraud, luxury and sloth; by general immorality and impiety; than by integrity, temperance, activity, and the general practice of sincere piety and virtue. But had we the capacity and opportunity of reviewing the history of the world from its
commence-

commencement, it would, I question not, give ample testimony to the moral attributes of God, by exhibiting the frequent and splendid triumphs of virtue over vice, and of religion and truth over infidelity, impiety and falsehood. Our faculties are too limited, and our materials too imperfect to lay open to us the whole process of God's past dispensations to all ages and nations of the earth. Yet still, broken as the monuments of antiquity have come down to us, they give sufficient evidence of the truth of God, and will be found upon examination to bear upon them this inscription, "the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."

THE deniers and disputers, as we may properly call them rather than the reasoners against the divine moral Attributes, affect on some occasions to appeal to the phenomena in support of their principles. Such an appeal we think highly proper on the present subject; and exclusive of the declarations

rations of the revealed will of God, we may venture to affirm, that the voice of nature in the course and history of the moral world is clear and decisive in favour of the believer; but to affirm is not enough; we may advance a step farther, and propose at this time to prove, that the different effects, fortunes and allotments of vice and virtue, of piety and impiety in the history of man, accord with revelation and the words of the holy penman in the text, that “the Lord
“is righteous in all his ways, and holy in
“all his works.”

THE history of man, as we have before observed, is too complicated and extensive to be completely investigated: much less could it be confined, or digested into a discourse of this nature. It may therefore be sufficient to the present purpose to refer to some capital facts, and to the taste and fortune of people and nations, whose history lies not too remote for our view. In the general survey of nations, we observe their
pulse,

pulse, their health, the tide of their power, wealth and grandeur, rise and fall in a suitable proportion to the stronger or weaker impression, made upon them, by the influence of principles moral, or immoral. We behold strength, conquest or empire, passing successively from the base and degenerate to the virtuous and brave, like an inheritance transmitted from the defunct father to the surviving son. What are the magnificent ruins, with which the traveller is entertained, both in the eastern and western world, but so many monuments of virtue and opulence, of arts and empire once flourishing, and long since perished together?

As you see the natural body preserved in health by temperance, and growing stronger by exercise, and the man increasing in fame and fortune by honest arts, by industry and integrity, but enfeebled and impoverished, and gradually declining in health, fortune and honour, by luxury, by lewdness and fraudulent practices; so we
find

find it in the body politic, in the societies and communities of men more at large; and shall we say, that this moral disposition is, and was the effect of mere natural attributes? Why did they not operate in a mere natural way? Or, why might not they have reserved the present order, and annexed misery to the virtuous, and happiness to the most immoral and impious of mankind? Or, why happiness and misery at all in a system of creation, intended only for the display of Divine Wisdom and power? Or, why was not the whole a mechanical apparatus operating uniformly or necessarily, without the free will of man to contravene and oppose the full efficacy of the Divine Attributes? Had not inviolable wisdom and uncontrollable power in such a state been more conspicuous, than in a system where both are, we may observe for moral ends, in frequent instances permitted to be defeated? If we may judge from the phœnomēna, we have much more reason to conclude, that Divine Power and

wisdom are made subservient to the righteousness and holiness of God, than that these are the effect and consequence of those; for in the system of creation, and in the procedure of Providence, we see generally wisdom planning, and power executing, in favour of virtue, and to the discouragement or dishonour of vice; whereas, supposing the Creator to have had no respect to vice or virtue in the plan of his creation, we might suspect that his wisdom had been mistaken, and his power defeated in effects produced altogether foreign to the views of the producer.

IF it is said, that the phœnomena or works of God, give no signatures, and bear no testimony to his will, thus distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked, we appeal to the history of the moral world, as clear and decisive on this subject, and at the same time as an awakening and instructive lesson to mankind. The annals of the remotest periods afford indeed little either of
use

DISCOURSE L 19

use or entertainment; as containing little more than barren lists of names and dates, or like the out-lying regions, and unknown lands in a map, are filled with desarts and monsters. The most ancient ruins extant, seem to remain for no other end but to invite the curiosity of the traveller, and to exercise the sagacity of the learned; yet maimed and imperfect as they are, they have a tongue, and speak a language moral, and I had almost said Divine; they speak the vanity of human grandeur, and the odiousness of human pride in the eyes of a righteous and holy God; “that he scattereth
 “the proud in the imagination of their
 “hearts, and sendeth the rich empty away;
 “that he humbleth the lofty city, and
 “bringeth to the dust the haughtiness of
 “the terrible.” Some of these ruins point out at the same time the grandeur and luxury of their founders, and are the only remains, like sepulchral monuments, of either.

As we advance from the rude and dark ages of antiquity to the clearer and more cultivated walk of history, we see the divine moral attributes more eminently displayed in the fate and fortune of nations ; and the rise, the progress, the decline and fall of empires in general, assignable to the greater or lesser influence of moral or religious principles, upon their conduct in the different periods of their existence ; and he has read history to little purpose, who has not observed the health of a state or nation, keeping pace with the stronger or weaker tone of its moral pulse ; and the stability and security of empire depending on the virtue and manners of its subjects. The natural blessings of the earth are not more regularly produced by a proper cultivation, than the civil advantages of life are the effects of our moral application and improvement.

If you here see an edifice falling into ruins, and there a field uncultivated, and covered

vered with briars and thorns through the sloth or carelessness of the owner or occupant; in the same manner, you observe here “of a “city an heap,” kingdoms dissolved and empires depopulated by the vices, and wickedness of the inhabitants; and the history of the world a standing and successive comment on the moral attributes of God. Let depopulated states, and desolated empires pass in review before you; examine their monuments, contemplate their ruins, and read their broken inscriptions; every trace and fragment will present you with this awful information, THIS HATH GOD DONE.

IT was He, who humbled the proud, who dissolved the luxurious, who restrained the ambitious; who confounded the flagitious, and checked the presumptuous; who brought to nought the Lords and tyrants of the earth.

THE history of God's moral administration, as it is connected with the history of

the world, as we just now observed, is too extensive, as indeed it is universal, and sometimes too secret and remote from human observation, to admit a full and clear exhibition, or recital and reference to, in a work of this kind. It may be sufficient to exhibit, or to remark upon a few obvious and memorable instances of Divine Interposition, in the fortune and fate of nations, which have figured most in the eye of the world; and from whence we may infer that the same measures are observed, and the same administration uniformly carried, in similar circumstances, by that God who is Lord of the whole earth, and “whose kingdom ruleth over all.”

DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

PSALMS cxlv. 17.

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and
holy in all his works.*

IF we are not on this occasion asserting,
or building upon the Divine Authority
and inspiration of the scriptures, we may
be allowed to cite, and to respect them for
their high moral import, and to appeal to

them as records of civil history the most ancient, and we presume the most authentic of any in the annals of time; though it may be considered as a presumptive argument of the truth of Divine Revelation that it holds out to us such divine moral attributes, as we experience to have still place in the general course of the moral world, and in the fate and fortunes of other states and kingdoms, as well as in those which are the special objects of God's judgements, and of the prophetic denunciations.

THERE is then this difference observable between the sacred writings, and the civil historian; that in the one, you find that declared as a prophecy, or denounced, or recorded as a judgment, which in the other is related as a fact; in this light we may consider the prophecy of Jeremiah: "And Chaldea shall be a spoil: all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith the Lord. Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine heritage, because ye are
"grown

“grown fat, as the heifer at grass, and bel-
“low as bulls.” Not only the history of
the nations threatened, but of all the most
rich and powerful cities, kingdoms and em-
pires of the earth, is an accomplishment of,
or a comment upon this prophecy. The
reasons assigned for the Divine Vengeance
against Moab by the same prophet, are as
follow. “Because thou hast trusted in thy
“works, and in thy treasures, thou shalt
“be taken : and Chemosh shall go forth in-
“to captivity with his priests and his prin-
“ces together. Moab hath been at ease
“from his youth, and he hath settled on
“his lees, and hath not been emptied from
“vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into
“captivity : therefore his taste remained in-
“him, and his scent is not changed. How
“say ye, we are mighty, and strong men
“for the war ? Thou daughter that dost
“inhabit Dibon, come down from thy glo-
“ry, and sit in thirst. The horn of Moab
“is cut off, and his arm is broken, saith
“the Lord. Make ye him drunken, for
“he

“ he magnified himself against the Lord.
 “ Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and
 “ he also shall be in derision. We have
 “ heard the pride of Moab, he is exceed-
 “ ing proud : his loftiness, and his arro-
 “ gancy, and his pride, and the haughti-
 “ ness of his heart. Joy and gladness shall
 “ be taken from the plentiful field. More-
 “ over, I will cause to cease in Moab, saith
 “ the Lord, him that offereth in the high
 “ places, and him that burneth incense to
 “ his gods.”

THE same moral reasons are assigned for
 the denunciation against Nebuchadnezzar.
 “ It is thou, O king, that art grown, and
 “ become strong: for thy greatness is grown,
 “ and reacheth unto heaven, and thy do-
 “ minion to the end of the earth. The
 “ king spake and said, is not this great Ba-
 “ bylon, that I have built for the house of
 “ the kingdom, by the might of my power,
 “ and for the honour of my majesty ?” In
 the same manner, the power, the pomp and
 pride

DISCOURSE II.

27

pride of Affyria are assigned by Ezekiel, as the cause of her fall. "Behold, the Affyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature ; and his top was among the thick boughs. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long, because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches ; for his root was by great waters. Therefore thus saith the Lord God ; because thou hast lifted up thyself in height, and he hath shot up his top among the thick boughs, and his heart is lifted up in his height ; I have therefore delivered him into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen ; he shall surely deal with him ; I have driven him out for his wickedness. And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off."

THE

THE sacred writers in foretelling the punishment or fall of nations, generally assign as the cause, a corruption in morals, or a defection from God. As in that against Egypt, "Thus saith the Lord God, I will
"also destroy the idols; and I will cause
"their images to cease out of Noph; and
"there shall be no more a prince of the
"land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in
"the land of Egypt." Thus again the prophet Isaiah speaks of Chaldea and Babylon; "Hear now this, thou that art given
"to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly,
"that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none
"else besides me: I shall not sit as a widow,
"neither shall I know the loss of
"children. But these two things shall
"come to thee in a moment, in one day, the
"loss of children, and widowhood: they
"shall come upon thee in their perfection,
"for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for
"the great abundance of thine enchantments: For thou hast trusted in thy
"wickedness: thou hast said, none seeth
"me,

DISCOURSE II.

29

“ me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge,
 “ it hath perverted thee ; and thou hast said
 “ in thy heart, I am, and none else besides
 “ me. Therefore shall evil come upon
 “ thee :” The same prophet having I pre-
 sume, in view the captivity of Samaria and
 Israel, recorded in the second book of kings,
 the eighteenth chapter ; assigns as the cause
 of it, not only their defection from God,
 but their degeneracy in morals, and that
 luxury which has generally preceded, and
 prepared the way for the fall or signal chas-
 tisement of states and empires. “ Wo unto
 “ them that rise up early in the morning,
 “ that they may follow strong drink, that
 “ continue until night, till wine inflame
 “ them. And the harp, and the viol, the
 “ tabret, and the pipe, and wine are in their
 “ feasts ; but they regard not the work of
 “ the Lord, neither consider the operation
 “ of his hands !”

As far as we can trace the history of
 mankind, we read of wars, removals, ex-
 tirpations, and other distresses of nations :

We

We have an account of tribes or people driven out by the children of Esau, and the children of Lot, long before the Israelites were commissioned by God to drive out the Canaanites. All these descendants of Abraham, the extirpators of other nations, became at last the victims of God's vengeance, and suffered the same measure that they had inflicted. The Jews, who had extirpated the Canaanites and other nations, were in their turn threatened with, as they afterwards suffered, the like severe chastisement from heaven, upon their defection from God. "And it shall be, if thou do
"at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk
"after other gods, and serve them, and
"worship them, I testify against you this
"day, that ye shall surely perish. As the
"nations which the Lord destroyeth before
"your face, so shall ye perish; because ye
"would not be obedient unto the voice of
"the Lord your God." When vice or
idolatry

idolatry have fattened the human sacrifice, and prepared them for destruction, the sword of God is drawn, and every place and nation, in its turn, is made an example to succeeding ages, of the miserable and ruinous effects of immorality and impiety. And in such instances of distress recorded in the most ancient history, where we find not the crimes of the sufferers specified, we may presume that the punishment was a moral and equal infliction, agreeable to the divine administration in latter instances, and which lie nearer to our view, and that the declaration of the prophet concerning God's righteous dealings in such visitations, hold universally in all times and places. "Thou
" didst march through the land in indigna-
" tion, thou didst thresh the heathen in an-
" ger. Thou wentest forth for the salvati-
" on of thy people, even for salvation with
" thine anointed. Thou woundedst the
" head out of the house of the wicked, by
" discovering the foundation unto the
" neck."

WE

WE may farther observe, that where the crimes of the sufferers are not expressly mentioned, yet we may collect from some circumstances of their story, that they were grown opulent and luxurious, and consequently by the abuse of Divine Mercy become proper objects of judgment. This we presume to have been the state of the Midianites slain by the children of Israel, from the account of the spoils taken, which consisted, in part, "of jewels of gold, chains and bracelets, rings, ear-rings, and tablets." "And the gold of the offering that they offered up to the Lord, of the captains of thousands, and of the captains of hundreds was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels."

MUCH clamour has been raised against the cruelty of the Israelites, in extirpating the Canaanites and the other nations, whom they drove out under the conduct of Joshua; but there had been much more room for clamour, had not these nations been distinguished for their crimes and impiety, assigned

signed by the sacred historians, as the cause of their destruction. “ Defile not you yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you. And the land is defiled; therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. All these abominations have the men of the land done which were before you; and the land is defiled: that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. Ye shall not walk in the manners of the nations, which I cast out before you; for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.”

SUPPOSE, according to the deistical objector, that the Jews were cruel, because the Canaanites were innocent, or more innocent than they are represented by the Jewish records; and let him vindicate the God of nature in permitting such carnage of the in-

nocent, which we ascribe to the God of Moses, on the supposition of their being wicked ; nor can the Jewish writers be justly accused of partiality in the accounts they have given us of the Canaanites, since they have with equal frankness recorded the idolatries, the defections and rebellion of their own people.

WHAT gives still more authority, or authenticity to the Jewish history, is that we observe the same Divine Government exercised over them, as over the other nations of the earth ; and only more visibly or miraculously administered. If the reign of Solomon makes the fairest and most splendid figure in their annals, and was the epocha of the greatest wealth, power, and extent of empire of this people ; it was at the same time, as will appear to be the fate of other nations, the period from whence the decline of their state commenced, and continued with some interruptions and intervals of peace and prosperity, suitable to the piety
and

and morals of prince and people, to its final overthrow by the Romans. Were we to consider the denunciations of their prophets, not as prophetic, but as merely historical records of the manners of the Jews, we should not wonder at the desolation of their city and country, and the dispersion of the people into every region under heaven; only this last circumstance points out something peculiar in their state, and is at the same time an ample testimony of the truth of the prophecy, and of the holiness of the Divine Administration respecting them.

BUT so much has been said on the fate and fortune of the Jews,* that it might seem impertinent to add more, did not our present subject, the fall of states, require that Jerusalem should not be forgotten. Her impiety and crimes† were notorious; and

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so

* See particularly Bp. *Newton's* learned, ingenious, instructive, and very entertaining Work on Prophecy.

† Josephus atrocissima eorum facinora describit, et pœnas graviores omnibus usquam auditis, et tamen, ut ipse censet, infra

so was her punishment. “Jerusalem shall
 “be troden down of the Gentiles; and
 “there shall not be one stone left upon ano-
 “ther:” how literally is this, and has been
 for ages past verified. The prophecy of
 Isaiah, respecting the desolation of Judea,
 has not been less faithfully accomplished.
 “The defenced city (says the Prophet) shall
 “be desolate, and the habitation forsaken,
 “and left like a wilderness: there shall the
 “calf feed, and there shall he lie down, and
 “consume the branches thereof.” How
 signally is this verified in the desolation that
 now covers, and has for some ages covered
 the Holy Land, which compared to its for-
 mer splendor, is now no more than a heap
 of ruins: and could we suppose Beroth at a
 few hours distance from Sidon; (and the
 tribe of Asher extended its borders from
 Carmel to Zidon †) could we, I say, sup-
 pose

infra meritum. Neque de Synedrio melius existimandum, &c.
Grotius de Veritat. Lib. 5.

† Thompson's Travels, vol. 3, p. 99.

pose Beroot in the holy Land, how minutely is the latter part of this verse verified in Fecandine's Orange-garden, the last effort of magnificence we read of in Syria and the East, being now turned by the Turks into a sheep-fold; as we are told by eye-witnesses it is at this day.* So again, though that of Isaiah may have, and has a direct eye to Sennacherib's invasion, yet it plainly looks further to the latter periods of the Jewish history, and extends to the Messiah: "Upon the pleasant fields, upon the fruitful vines, upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city: because the palaces shall be forsaken, the multitude of the city shall be left, the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks:" the present site of Jerusalem, and the country round about, is a dreadful testimony of the truth of this prophecy: and we cannot but blush at the

* See Thompson's Travels, Vol. 3. p. 44.

the perverseness and folly of the unbeliever, who objects to the truth of the sacred history, because the promised land is not at this time what that history describes it once to have been, a land flowing with milk and honey; that is, he would have the prophecies falsified in order to give more credibility to the Bible.*

EGYPT, I presume from several circumstances, as the Ishmaelites from Gilead, with their camels bearing Spicery and Balm and Myrrh, going to carry it down to this country, the number of Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen, his treasure, cities, &c. was a powerful, magnificent and luxurious state at the time of its severe castigation by the plagues, and by the overthrow of the Red Sea.

In the same manner you may collect from several passages in Homer, that Troy was

* Vide Voltaire's Universal History.

was an opulent and delicate city, before her sacrifices were rejected by heaven, and before she fell by the arms of the more barbarous and hardy Greeks.

PERHAPS no city was ever more proud, pompous, and luxurious than Babylon: the night, in which it was taken by Cyrus, employed as it was in festivity, riot and debauch, sufficiently indicates the moral state and degeneracy of its Inhabitants, both prince and people at the time of its fall. When Sardis was taken by Cyrus, both this capital, and its King Cræsus, were distinguished for their abundance of treasure; and probably no strangers to the luxury and pleasures which wealth generally introduces.

UPON this occasion, and reflecting on the virtues for which Cyrus was distinguish'd, we may observe in general, in the æras of pagan history, when arms and conquest were the chief business of mankind,

morals still victorious; and cowardice, sloth, luxury and impiety generally falling victims to bravery, industry, temperance and religion.

UPON the ruins of the Babylonian, arose the Persian Empire, which seem'd to have been arrived to its highest pitch of strength and grandeur, when it received that severe stroke at the battle of Artemisium and Salamis by the confederate Greeks. We cannot easily conceive, by what treasures such a fleet and army were equipped and subsisted, as Xerxes had upon his Grecian Expedition. And how signally did the righteous power of Providence appear in confounding the vain hopes, and humbling the pride of the Persian monarch. He seemed to say with the king of Egypt, I will pursue, &c. and God seemed to interpose as of old: "he blew with the wind, and the sea covered them, &c." The distress and sufferings of the Persian fleet upon the coast of Magnesia, and in sailing round Eubea,

Herodotus

Herodotus ascribes to the gods ; (as the Athenians upon their return erected a temple to Boreas, as their preserver or benefactor on this occasion ;) who, he says, did this to reduce the Persian fleet to an equality with the Grecian, or at least not to leave them so much superior in number. They were however still far superior in number, so that they surrounded the Grecian fleet, when the Almighty again interposed to break the head of this Leviathan at Salamis and Mycale. His army at Platœa met with no better success ; out of three hundred thousand men, not more than three thousand escaping the sword, besides those forty thousand who fled away with Artabazus. And what renders this victory of the Greeks over the Persians more signal is, that it was gained with the loss only of ninety one Spartans, sixteen Tegeans, and fifty two Athenians slain ! A more extraordinary defeat, or more miraculous victory we scarce read of in the sacred story. That the morals of the Persians were at this time corrupted,

I con-

I conjecture from this circumstance, that we find their army attended with concubines ; these made part of the spoil, which besides consisted of great quantities of gold and silver, chariots plated with gold and silver, goblets of gold, and other vases of gold and silver, chains, bracelets, and scymitars of gold, with rich apparel of various colours : sufficient proofs of the delicacy and luxury, as well as of the opulence of the Persians at this time. And the sparing and hardy Spartans may be considered as a proper instrument in the hand of Providence to chastise this voluptuous nation.

YET the overgrown opulence of this mighty empire still subsisted for a while longer, till an advancing degeneracy and corruption of morals prepared it for a final overthrow.

DARIUS, when he advanced to meet Alexander, might seem by his equipments to be going forth to celebrate a feast or a triumph, and not upon the march to fight a
battle

battle and gain a victory ; loaded as he was with implements of luxury, rather than with accoutrements of war. When I see him advance to the battle with all the splendor of wealth, and in all the pomp of luxury : when I see him fall, and with him the Persian Empire : what see I else but enormous vice, led like a fatted victim to the sacrifice, and the dissolution of a monarchy distempered from head to foot. The state was mortally sick, before the Macedonian drew his sword to let out the remains of life, that was only supported by debauch. At the time that the Persian Empire fell by the fall of Darius, and Babylon came into the hands of the conqueror, nothing could seem to be more corrupt than the manners of both prince and people.* And we may rather wonder at the patience of Providence in bearing with them so long, than that they at last fell a sacrifice to their own sloth and cowardice, effeminacy and debauchery.

ANTI-

* Nihil urbis ejus corruptius moribus ; nec ad irritandas inlicendasque immodicas voluptates instructius. Liberos
con-

ANTIOCHUS the great, one of the last princes, who figured in the East, and who might seem to have imitated Darius in the pomp, the splendor and greatness of his preparations, fell like him, conquered, as is acknowledged by the conquerors, by his own cowardice and luxury. || We see him when engaged in war with the Romans, defeated before the approach of an enemy: the very report of one was sufficient to put to flight a man already subdued by his vices.

If the Athenians were not tainted with the luxury of the Persians, they were not perhaps less inflamed with pride, and the ambition

conjugesque cum hospitibus stupro coire, modo pretium flagitii detur, parentes maritique patiuntur. Convivales ludi tota perfide regibus purpuratisque cordi sunt: Babylonii maxime in vinum, etquæ ebrietatem sequuntur, effusi sunt. Feminarum—comitas habetur vulgati corporis vilitas.
Quint. Curt. Lib. 5. C. 1.

|| Talem regem sua Luxuria debellatum, &c. Flor. Lib. 2. Cap. 8.

DISCOURSE II. 45

ambition of conquest and empire ; before their final ruin, when they had two wars at once upon their hands, we are told by their own historians, that their obstinacy was risen to so high a pitch, that had it not been visible to all the world, the bare mention of its possibility would have been quite incredible. They were at the height of their power and pride, and enjoyed the largest tract of empire that any state of Greece had at that time done, when they received the most fatal blow by the destruction of Nicias and Demosthenes with their fleet and armies. None had been so vain of their naval strength and skill, yet in these they were most ignobly defeated, and saw all their glory miserably shipwrecked in the harbour of Syracuse. They set out as lords of the ocean, and were at last forced to attempt a stolen flight by land. They began their voyage with peans and presages of victory, they now dislodged with groans and omens, that portended nothing but ruin : they proceeded upon their Sicilian expedition with a design to enslave others

others, and were enslaved themselves: they wantonly invaded the possessions of foreigners, and thereby lost their own. Thus fell Athens a sacrifice to her own injustice, presumption and ambition.

ON this occasion we cannot but observe the righteousness of Providence in humbling the proud, as well as in dissolving the luxurious. It was when Alexander, the he-goat in Daniel, "waxed very great, "and when he was strong, that the great "horn was broken." The words of the historian Justin are a proper comment on this prophecy of Daniel, that Alexander the great was taken off in the bloom of his age, and the splendor of his victories.*

THE figure the Thebans made among the antient state of Grace was transient, yet great and illustrious, and is not without a moral lesson on the present subject: if two
citizens

* Extincto in ipso ætatis ac victoriarum flore Alexandro magno. Justin, Lib. 13. Cap. 1.

citizens by the mere force of virtue cou'd raise their country from contempt to a lustre and glory that amaz'd and aw'd the rest of Greece: what wonders might not be performed, and what successes not insured by the united virtue of a whole nation? If heaven thus favoured the efforts of two brave and honest men, what blessings might not be expected from the prowess, integrity and piety of a whole people. The history of Thebes, short as it is, teaches us another lesson concerning Providence, or we may say, confirms us in its truth: heaven, in this instance, to distinguish its Power and Providence, raised up the most contemptible of the states of Greece, to humble the pride, insolence and injustice of the Spartans, deemed at that time invincible.

WE cannot on this subject, the fall of states, close the page of antient Eastern Story without casting a mournful eye on the broken, yet elegant remains of Palmyra.

myra. At the first sight, or mere representation of these ruins, as they are exhibited to us by the curious travellers, their magnificence and elegance strike you with a pleasing wonder, which is immediately succeeded, at least I found it so, with a deep sensibility of the uncertainty of human greatness, and the awful process of a Divine Providence, in thus humbling the efforts of human pride. In this scene of desolation I thought there appeared visibly the Hand of Heaven. The ravage of an enemy rarely makes such universal ruin, or extends to the laboured demolition of every monument of art, especially where the materials are so hard and durable, and no advantage thereby accrues to the ravager. The city might have been dismantled upon policy ; but it could serve no interests to tear its bowels, and rend it as it were piece-meal, and limb from limb. But what, or whoever was the executioner, there appears to me the hand of a righteous God in the execution. City or empire never fell thus low, without some distinguished
and

and inveterate crimes of the possessors preceding. The very ruins before us yet speak and tell us, that the Palmerines were a delicate and dissolute people; and the reflection of the critic upon this occasion is both just and obvious. "The want of this species of Architecture (the Doric) makes me suspect, the ruins which now remain, were built at a time, when an unbounded luxury had over-run the state, and almost extinguished the natural taste for truth and propriety."* And afterwards; "I am inclinable to think the ruins now before us were erected in the age immediately preceding, or in that of Zenobia herself, when the splendid Corinthian order only could satisfy the luxury of the times, which had eradicated that taste for propriety, which otherwise would have been occasionally delighted with the milder charms of the Doric Order." †

THAT the Palmerines were grown to a
VOL. I. E high

* Letters concerning Taste, p. 82.

† Ib. p. 85.

high degree of luxury, is to me evident enough by a letter extant of Aurelian to Zenobia, commanding her submission: one of the conditions of which was; "Gemmas, argentum, aurum, sericum, equos, camelos in *Ærarium Romanum* conferas."* And the same writer continuing the subject of this people, or rather of the emperor's victory over them, adds, "tunc illæ vestes quas in templo solis videmus, confertæ gemmis; tum perfici dracones et tiaræ; tum genus purpuræ quod postea nec ulla gens detulit, nec Romanus orbis vidit."†

THE ingenious travellers, who have favoured the public with these curious ruins, have observed that the Palmerines were in the time of Mark Antony a rich, trading, and free people. How long they had been in possession of these advantages we are left to conjecture. It seems probable, that their riches, and of course their trade must have been

* Vopisc. *Histor. Roman. Scriptor. Lat.* Tom. 2. p. 393.

† Ibid.

been of some standing; for we shall find by the inscriptions, that in less than forty years after, they were luxurious and expensive to such a degree, as must have required considerable wealth to support.

THE story of Rome is well known; and the steps by which she declined, as evident as those by which she rose to empire: yet she made too considerable a figure not to demand our notice on the subject of our present discourse. One of the causes assigned for her fall, is as follows. “It must be
 “acknowledged that the Roman laws were
 “too weak to govern the republick: but
 “experience has proved it to be an invariable fact, that good laws which raise the
 “reputation and power of a small republick, become incommodious to it, when
 “once its grandeur is established, because
 “it was their natural effect to make a great
 “people, but not to govern them.”*

E 2

BARON

* Montesquieu: Grandeur and Declension of the Romans.
 p. 91.

BARON MONTESQUIEU is so refined a speculatist and extraordinary genius, that he could give a hundred reasons for or against the same side of the question : reasons which perhaps had no foundation in fact and truth. On the present subject, we conceive that a multiplicity of laws speaks a multiplicity of crimes ; and that such laws may be justly considered rather as a consequence, and intended for correctives than a cause of corruption and decline.

TEN thousand things may, or may not be, in abstracted speculation and political refinement, which have no place in fact or experience : this however is certain, that the virtues which raised the Romans to be masters of the world, had, if persevered in, preserved their power and empire : or to speak plainer ; it was the want or absence of those very virtues, which had raised Rome to dominion and empire, that occasioned her fall. *

THE

* *Potentia Romanorum prior Scipio viam aperuerat, luxuriæ posterior aperuit. Quippe, remoto Carthaginis metu subla-*

THE first Romans were distinguished for their religion, or fear of the gods, and for the moral virtues, which are naturally produced by the influence of religious principles: they were temperate, patient and persevering, courageous and daring, yet compliant to order, and submissive to authority: every citizen was a patriot, and a hero, resolved to do and suffer all things for the security, the liberty, the reputation, and the

E 3

glory

sublataque imperii æmulâ, non gradu, sed præcipiti cursu, a virtute descitum, ad vitia transcursum; vetus disciplina deserta, nova inducta; in somnum a vigiliis, ab armis ad Voluptates, a negotiis in otium conversa civitas.

Paterculus. Lib. 2. C. 1.

Imperium facile iis artibus retinetur, quibus initio partum est. Verum ubi pro labore, desidia: pro continentia et æquitate, libido atque superbia, invasere; fortuna simul cum moribus immutatur. Ita imperium semper ad optimum quemque ab minus bono transfertur.

Pro pudore, pro abstinentia, pro virtute, audacia, largitio, avaritia vigeant. Quis est omnium his moribus, quin divitiis et sumptibus, non probitate neque industriâ, cum majoribus suis contendat? &c.

Et Vi. Caton. Concion. in Bell. Catili. Salust.

glory of his country. Various occasions offered, that called forth all their virtues, kept them in exercise, and put them to the full exertion. Heaven seconded their virtuous efforts, and crowned their arms with conquest, fame and empire. Rome arrived to its height, began to decline by the declension of its virtues: power and security from danger unnerved the strong, and rendered the vigilant remiss; exposed the republick to insults abroad, and to civil wars at home: a selfish ambition took place of the love of country, and zeal for the public was extinguished in party rage: the riches of Asia, and the spoils of the conquered provinces introduced indolence and sloth, luxury and avarice, and all the arts, follies, and vices of a corrupted state. If their courage survived their other virtues, it was a kind of mechanical ferocity contracted by long use, and now at the disposal of the ambitious, and engaged by the wages of corruption. Religion, the only effectual restraint upon the human conduct, being banished

nished by the introduction of the principles of Epicurus,* gave liberty to every man to do what was right in his own eyes; till a tyrant seems to have become necessary to curb those, who like the Israelites had renounced the government of God, and the protection of his Providence. A succession of these tyrants, monsters of impiety, debauchery and cruelty, was permitted to lash the Romans into virtue, or to correct and punish their vices: under whom the republick, or we should rather say, the state, languished rather than lived under a complication of disorders, with some few intervals of precarious health; till Rome, imperial, immortal, eternal Rome, the mistress of the world, the strong and spreading oak, which had covered all the beasts of the earth, having accomplished her fate, the fate of nations, expires, or rather dwindles away, a poor and shrivell'd plant, deprived of its native virtue and the benign influences of heaven, and is scattered, the sport of winds, into the common mass of universal matter!

E 4

DIS-

• Montesquieu.

DISCOURSE III.

PSALMS cxlv. 17.

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy
in all his works.*

GOD and his attributes, we may presume from his supreme perfection, must be unchangeable, and the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: the God of Moses, as certainly as he is the true God, must be the righteous and holy Governor of, and through all the earth.

THE

THE immutability of God which has been objected and alledged, as inconsistent with all moral and providential interpositions, is so far from being conclusive against, that it strongly supports them. God's immutability must respect his other attributes : for instance ; he must be immutable in holiness, wisdom, justice and goodness : this allowed, it follows, that God in the government of his creatures must pursue the same rules of holiness, &c. and that this very unchangeableness of conduct must infer a changeableness of measures suited to the variable conduct of mankind. For instance ; the same unchangeable holiness and justice that blesses and rewards the good, must upon an alteration and degeneracy of their conduct, punish and reclaim the bad. The same unchangeable goodness that wills the happiness of mankind, must in proportion to their wants, interpose and relieve his creatures : and till we can prove an uniformity of behaviour in man, we can never
maintain

DISCOURSE III. 59

maintain an uniform administration in the government of God.

LET us cast a transient eye on modern times, and modern history, and we shall assuredly find the same divine moral administration carried on, as in the ages and nations, that have long since passed away. We have only to lament, that our materials on this occasion, though they seem to lie nearer to our view, are by the hands they have passed through, less copious, or rather not so choice and pertinent, as those we meet with in remoter times : The truth is, and must not be dissembled, that the antient pagan has generally more religion than the modern and the christian. Facts, manners and characters, with the singular interpositions of Providence, or what were deemed such, engaged the attention, and the pen of the best Greek and Roman historians ; while a tedious detail of political proceedings, or a dry discussion of political principles, the pertness of minute philosophy, or the petulance

lance and envenomed malignity of a party spirit, stain every page of the christian, and peculiarly of the modern British History ; in the authors and compilers of which, at least in some of them, we observe a studied affectation to exclude the hand of Providence from all the works of nature and the revolutions of states.

LORD CLARENDON is to be excepted from this censure, who writes both with the genius and in the spirit of antiquity, and has ingenuously and honestly observed, and pointed out to the reader's observation the hand of God, as it appears on any signal occasion. In most other writers of modern history, we are left to select our materials, to moralize upon them, and to apply them to the present subject. And let those who have leisure and opportunity study the history of human nature, with the same attention that has been employed in the investigation of the system of nature, and they would not fail

fail to find the same abundant instances of the same eternal power and Godhead.

THE christians of the Greek empire seem to have been their own executioners, and by their avarice, ambition, treachery, levity, and discord, carelessness and degenerate cowardice, to have opened the gates of their empire to the Turk. They had little left before their final extirpation, and the ruin of their state, but an emperor without an empire; nobles without honour, subjects without loyalty, and christians without faith and morals. Nay, it seems remarkable, that the utter ruin of their affairs, and their extirpation from Syria and Palestine, by the loss of Ptolemais, was not brought about, till their morals were grossly, if not universally corrupted.* Babylon itself, when taken

* For the state of morals in the city of Ptolemais, the only city now remaining to the christian name. See Knowles' valuable history of the Turks, p. 158, &c.

ken by Alexander was scarce so corrupt as this christian city.

THE state of the church was at this time truly deplorable. Party spirit, wars and bloodshed had taken place of brotherly charity; humility was banished by the pride of the bishops and the devotion of the people, what devotion remained was spent on rites and ceremonies, as if the levitical law had been still in force, or had been newly restored. The rational, the moral, the spiritual religion of Jesus was degenerated into barren controversy, into verbal dispute and artificial theology, while bodily exercises and severities were instituted in the room of internal habits of piety.*

THE

* PRINCIPES primum christianos nullum fecisse bellandi modum, etiam cum pace frui liceret; episcopos acerrime inter se certasse, de summis sedibus, ac sicut olim arbori vitæ prælata arbor scientiæ maxima dederat mala, ita tunc quoque curiosam eruditionem pietati antehabitam, & ex religione artem factam, &c.

Grotius de Verit. Lib. 6.

THE riches found in Damascus, and Dair-Abil-Kodos, shew that the christians of the East, at the time when they were attacked by the Saracens, were greatly degenerated : these at least were honest in their truces, faithful to their promises, active, strictly sober, merciful, and religious in their way; and it might be reasonably expected, that God would give success to them, though denying his truth, with which they had not had the same opportunities to be acquainted as the Greeks, and against which they might plausibly have some prejudice from observing the manners of its professors; I say, God might reasonably give success to these against those, who after fuller information and knowledge, had in fact renounced that truth, though they still retained the name of believers. A holy God must have more respect to an honest Saracen, than to an immoral christian.

THE Arabs under the first Caliphs, Abubeker and Omar, that made such a rapid conquest

conquest of Syria and Palestine, were wild, unarmed, undisciplined troops; rose as it were in an instant; (for how many hundred years did the Romans fight before they made half the figure!) and rolled down like a flood, without any considerable let or hindrance, still gathering new strength; and against the obstructions of a well-formed, long established empire, in the course of half a century, became masters of the Eastern World.

LUXURY, effeminacy, and immorality, dissentions, treachery, avarice and debauchery had prepared the christians for the sacrifice; and nothing was wanting to begin and finish it, but God's Fiat to the sword of the Saracen to unsheath and conquer. Thus Damascus, Hams, Jerusalem, Tripoli, Cesarea, and the rest of Syria, Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, part of Africa, and the greatest part of Persia fell into the hands of the conquerors in less time than the Romans conquered one city. We should not wonder

wonder at this rapid success, when we read the following words of the historian : “ To
 “ the first success, and fame of the Turco-
 “ man nation, the effeminate cowardice of
 “ those delicate people of Asia, with whom
 “ they had to do, gave no less furtherance,
 “ than their own valour, &c.”

It is not in the power of man to account for all the ends of Providence in the rise, the support, and enlargement of the great Ottoman Empire ; but this we may from a superficial survey of their history affirm, that the first establishment of, and accessions to their Empire were made upon the ruin of christian morals ; and that the progress of their arms in the West has been generally owing to the sloth, the treachery and cowardice, the divisions and debauchery of christian princes and states. What is said of Poland, when attacked by the Turks in the year one thousand six hundred and seventy two, that it was sick, and languishing with its own intestine distempers, and that the

civil and most detestable discords of that country laid them open to the fury of their enemies, and that they were proud, debauched, &c.* may be in part, or in the whole applied to the other christian states and kingdoms, over whom the Turk has gained the most signal advantages. God might with no less wisdom than justice employ this people as scourges, and instruments to correct more enlightened offenders. It will be perhaps difficult to shew one important war successfully carried on by the Ottoman arms against the powers of Europe, where the vanquished did not contribute to, or invite their own losses by imprudence, immorality, or impiety; by selfishness and remissness, ambition and dissensions among themselves, least becoming christians; or by a disregard of that God, whose cause they would seem to assert.

THE author has not an opportunity to inform

* See Sir P. Rycaut's History of the Turkish Empire, p. 300, 296, and 230.

inform himself of the state of morals in Poland preceding her present sufferings, he would only observe, and he scarce needs observe what is notorious to all the world, that she was like Jerusalem, convulsed in every part by the domestic rage of her own citizens, before she was exposed to the hostile invasion of her neighbours, which she might properly seem to invite; if the Poles have not now as formerly, for thus they are publicly charged, betrayed and sold their own rights and liberties. If the Polish nobility be, as they are described, fastidious, expensive, pompous; absolute tyrants over their tenants and vassals, and accustomed to determine all right and justice by the sword, may they not in the scheme of a righteous Providence be justly and mercifully reduced to know themselves, their wants and dependency, and to experience that oppression and violence from their neighbours, which they have exercised among themselves.

WE may further observe in the vindication of the righteous Providence of God, that the Turkish empire never made any considerable progress, but received the most dreadful blows, when engaged with virtuous princes and states, as Tamerlane, Scanderbeg, Uladisslaus, and John of Huns: the prince of Epire, and king of Hungary, with a handful of men did more towards humbling the Turk, than the united powers of Christendom have done ever since: Scanderbeg was generally victorious; and Uladisslaus with his General Huniades were so, till they fought the battle of Varna, in violation of a solemn treaty confirmed by oath, which ended in the destruction of the one, and the total overthrow of both.

TRANSILVANIA, Moldavia, &c. waged a long and terrible war against the Turks, until revolutions, unquietness and factions so spent them, that they at length became another addition to the empire of the Turks, who now (says the historian) impose

pose on them a heavy yoke, and a strait curb, not to be imputed to any thing less than to Divine Justice, which takes occasion to exercise a kind of severity against the unseasonable negligence, sedition, and variance of christians among themselves, at a time when the common enemy to their profession watched only the opportunity of their own dissensions, to enter and devour them.*

Look on the seven churches, or rather the seven cities, the seats of the seven churches of Asia, as they are described by modern travellers, and what do they speak but the righteous and awful judgments of God on the degeneracy of man, for his abuse of the most precious mercies of heaven?

BEFORE we leave the East, it may not be improper to take notice of the miserable state of modern Persia, and by what means it was reduced to the slavery, and sufferings,

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under

* Sir P. Ryc. State of the Ottoman Empire, p. 113.

under which it has of late years so signally laboured. We have clear and full information on this subject given us by an ingenious traveller, an eye-witness, and one eminent for his love of truth, virtue, and mankind.

“ A general depravity of manners involved
“ Persia in inextricable confusion. They
“ were a people departed from almost every
“ virtue. The Persians by the neglect of
“ moral duties, have prepared the way
“ for that ruin in which they are involved.
“ In Persia, ignorance and want of foresight,
“ with an universal corruption of manners,
“ prepared the necks of the people for the
“ yoke to which they have now submitted.
“ Nadir mounted the throne by means of the
“ corruption and immorality of the people;
“ by whom every social virtue was neglect-
“ ed: common faith and common honesty
“ were little more among them than bare
“ names. The subjects of Persia in general
“ were almost as little worthy of mercy, as
“ their king was disposed to shew it. Their
“ corruption rendered them mature for de-
“ struction.

“struction. Had the people been less vicious, the vices of the usurper could not have been so destructive.”*

“THE modern Egyptians are, and have been generally more wretched, as they have generally been more wicked than other nations.”†

THE same Divine Government and salutary castigation you will find taking place, in the western as in the eastern world, and in every nation under heaven, when ripe for judgment.

So just, and in general so certain, are God’s judgments to pursue the wicked, and so regularly has vengeance overtaken enormous offenders, that you may often foresee the tyrant’s death by his life, and foretel the cruelties he has to suffer, by those he has

F 4

exer-

* Hanway’s Remarks, &c.

† See Thevenot, as quoted by Bishop Newton on Prophecy, Vol. I. p. 396.

exercised ; thus generally it fares with nations and public communities ; and though we may not presume to limit the mercy of God, nor comprehend all the ways of his Providence, yet this we may safely affirm, that there has been scarcely a kingdom or people upon earth, with whose history we are acquainted, who have been signal sufferers before they had manifested themselves to be distinguished sinners ; and we may almost predict the fate of a nation from the state of its morals.

BEFORE the Tartars subdued the kingdom of Corea, we are told, that it was full of luxury and debauchery, the whole business of the Corefians being eating and drinking, and giving themselves up to all lewdness. And we may presume from the little opposition which the same Tartars met with in their invasions of the other Chinese Provinces, that these were greatly degenerated, and fallen into a state of cowardice and effeminacy at the time of this invasion ; when, to use the
language

language of the historian, it is said, “ the
 “ Tartars began to try their valour against
 “ the delights of China.”* A remarkable
 instance of this degenerate spirit we have in
 the conduct of the Emperor Vu an Lie.
 The enemy entered his Capital, filled it with
 blood and slaughter, and coming to his pa-
 lace, found him fast asleep, and wholly ig-
 norant of the disaster.†

BUT to turn our views to the Western
 world; what a scene of misery and confusion
 again was Poland, in the beginning of this
 century, in consequence of their having elect-
 ed Augustus of Saxony to that throne?
 Why should we wonder at this, when we are
 told in history, the electors had lost their vir-
 tue, and set themselves to sale.‡

IF most of the persecuting emperors were
 cut

* Navarette in Churchill's Collection of Voyages, Vol. 1,
 p. 303.

† Navarette, ib. p. 304.

‡ Burnet's Hist. of his own Times, V. 5. p. 844.

cut off one after another in a very remarkable manner, it is not less certain that the empire itself was visited with plague and famine, with civil wars, with inundations of savage and barbarous people, Persians, Goths, Germans, Scythians, &c. till all Italy and Rome itself fell into their hands and was plundered by them; where it should be observed, the Romans were at this time, christians in name, but idolaters in fact.*

No reader is unacquainted with the misery and confusion occasioned by the irruptions of the Goths and Vandals into the more polished and enlightened European provinces: but every reader is not equally informed of the crimes and immoralities, which at that time disgraced Christendom, and invited the incursions of these barbarians, who

* *POSTQUAM* imperatores facti erant christiani, Romæ mansit idololatria, tum in senatu, tum in plebe. *POSTQUAM* ecclesia ad christianos principes venerit, potentia quidem & divitiis major, virtutibus minor facta est.

DR. JORTIN'S Disc. of the truth of the christian religion, p. 159, and notes.

who were indeed the better men. A writer by no means suppos'd to be prejudiced in favour of religion, tells us, that of all the northern nations, the Goths were esteemed the most civil, orderly and virtuous, and are for such commended by St. Austin and Salvian, who make their conquests to be given them by the justice of God, as a reward of their virtue, and a punishment upon the Roman provinces, for the viciousness and corruption of their laws and government. *

THE misery of the Romans, was I imagine in Salvian's time, during the reign of Zeno, in the year four hundred and eighty, distinguished and great; for then their wickedness seems to be at the highest. Salvian's description of the state of morals, is most shocking: and it had been the greatest imputation on the righteous Providence of Heaven, had not some signal vengeance fallen on these offenders. It is remarkable that
their

* Sir Wm. Temple's Miscellanies, vol. 2. p. 224.

their conquerors and oppressors, though
 barbarians, were more virtuous: “ Inter
 “ pudicos barbaros, impudici sumus: of-
 “ fenduntur barbari ipsi impuritibus nos-
 “ tris. Esse inter Gothos non licet scorta-
 “ torem Gothum: impudicitiam nos diligi-
 “ mus, Gothi execrantur: puritatem nos
 “ fugimus, illi amant: fornicatio apud illos
 “ crimen atque discrimen est, apud nos de-
 “ cus. Omnis impuritatis scelus, omnis
 “ impuditiæ turpitude a Romanis admit-
 “ titur, et barbaris vindicatur. Et mira-
 “ mur, si terræ vel Aquitanorum, vel nos-
 “ trum omnium a Deo barbaris datæ sunt?
 “ cum ea quæ Romani polluerant fornicati-
 “ one, nunc mundant barbari castitate. Sal-
 “ vian. Jam apud Gothos, impudici non
 “ sunt, nisi Romani: jam apud Wandalos,
 “ nec Romani.” Do. ad fin. L. 7. Au-
 gury and other gentile rites were in use a-
 mong the christians in Salvian’s time.
 “ Christo ergo, (O amentia monstruosa!)
 “ Christo circenses afferimus, & mimos;
 “ tunc & hoc maxime, cum ab eo aliquid
 “ boni cupimus, cum prosperitatis ab eo ali-
 quid

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“quid attribuitur, aut victoria de hostibus a
“divinitate præstatur.” This, says Salvian,
is to injure our benefactor, and to affront
our friend. Lib. 5. 16. We may add,
that Spain distinguished for lust and impu-
rity, was given up to the Vandals remarkable
for their chastity.

WERE we to read this, or the history of
any other nation in Europe with an eye to
its Providential Administration, it would
give us better information, more profit, as
well as delight, than the political refine-
ments of the most celebrated wits of Rome
or Italy.

EXAMINE the history of France, Spain
or Britain with this providential key in your
hand, it will give you a better insight into
the causes of the rise or decline, the prospe-
rity or distress, as founded in the morals of
each nation, than the speculations, the
comments and bold conjectures of the most
sharp-

78 DISCOURSE III.

sharp-sighted politician, or statesman, can afford you.

HENRY the Fifth, King of England, on seeing the prisoners at Calais, declared to them, that he believed he owed his victory to God's intention of punishing them for all their excesses; for they had spared neither things sacred nor profane, and there was no kind of crimes, which they had not committed.

IN confirmation of this reproof it might be further observed, that the periods most distinguished for the civil wars, distresses, and other calamities of the French nation, were the times most notorious for immorality, unbounded licentiousness, and unabashed lewdness in both prince and people: and it has been justly observed of them by a modern historian that they were at the same time most distinguished for their crimes and calamities;* nor has the lawless ambition
of

* History of England in a Series of Letters.

of their princes been less a source of misery to this people, than their other vices. This nation in her most ambitious views of extended empire, under two kings, Charles the Eighth, and Francis the First, saw herself brought almost to the brink of desolation: Naples, the object of her ambition, was the rock on which she split, and where she saw her nobles, her armies, and an immense treasure, as in a moment overwhelmed. Francis, like Athens, sent out his fleet and armies, more like a conqueror, than a warrior, and like Athens met with the same reward of his arrogance and injustice.* The ambition, and injustice of Lewis the Fourteenth in the invasion of his neighbours, were not more notorious than his mortification in the disgrace of his arms, and the overthrow of his attempts.

BUT perhaps no enterprize was ever more unrighteous, nor ambition more aspiring, nor
arrogance

* Vide Guiccardini.

arrogance more presumptuous (if we except Xerxes, and his invasion of Greece) than that of Philip the Second of Spain, when he sent forth his invincible Armada to swallow up the religion, the laws and liberty of Britain; but here, as in the case of the Persian tyrant, "God blew with his wind, "and the waters covered them."

NOR can Britain plead her exemption from crimes, and providential visitations: the noble historian, who was a witness to the miseries and civil distractions of his own country, though he owns that these miseries proceeded from, and were brought upon his country by natural causes, yet he adds, like one acquainted with the history of the nations of the world, that these were the same natural causes, which have usually attended kingdoms swollen with long plenty, pride and excess, towards some signal mortification and castigation of heaven.*

THERE

* Clarendon, Vol. 1. p. 2.

DISCOURSE III. 81

THERE is a time, when the abundance of God's blessings in the natural world is abused, and applied to luxury and excess; and then heaven interposes by plague or famine to check man's misapplication, and to teach him moderation and pious gratitude.

THERE is a time, when peace is abused as well as plenty, and men under no danger from abroad, grow fearlessly wicked and licentious at home. To remedy this, war is sent from the magazine of God to lay waste the nations, and to teach mankind to enjoy their happiness with sobriety and a chaste joy.

THERE is a time, when the tyrants of the earth, elated with flattery and grown mad with pride, exalt themselves above humanity, and treat their subjects as slaves, regardless of the rights and properties of those whom they should protect, and despisers of both God and man. Against these God raises up a spirit of liberty within the

bowels of their own kingdom, or pours in from abroad some hardy invader, to vindicate the rights of God and man, and to bring such enormous offenders to justice,

AGAIN, there is a time, when faction and rebellion rend the state in pieces, and all the boundaries of law and justice are trampled on; when power is made the measure of right, and ambition or low self-interest dictate the measures of government, and sacrifice religion and truth to their lust. Against these Heaven raises some despotic ruler to awe mutiny into submission, and to chastise with scorpions a people, who would not be governed by the rule of equity and reason.

SUCH are the reflections which we are naturally led to make in perusing the noble historian; he sometimes makes them for us: for he was not one of those who thought morals and good faith unnecessary qualifications in the statesman, or considered religion as a mere engine of human policy. He

was

was a sincere believer, and has given us throughout his works very signal instances of the Divine interposition respecting both particular persons and general bodies. The last instance of this kind he produces is so remarkable to our present purpose, that it must not be omitted. A gay, modern French writer of a very different character in the province of history, and who has employed his wit and genius to exclude Providence, or to traduce it, and to contrast present appearances and the supposed irregularities in nature to the truths and revealed will of God, ascribes, the restoration of Charles the second, to chance. "Chance," says he, "did that for Charles, which, " &c."* But our noble historian, who was an eye-witness to, and an actor in most of the occurrences, that preceded and attended this great event, saw it in a very different light. "It was," says he, "the King's great happiness, that the General never owned his purpose to serve his
G 2 "majesty,

* Voltaire's Age of Louis the Fourteenth.

“majesty, till it fell to be in his power,
“and indeed was the best thing in his
“power to do. If he had declared his re-
“solution sooner, he had been destroyed
“himself; the whole machine being so in-
“finitely above his strength, that it could
“be only moved by a Divine Hand; and
“it is glory enough to his memory, that
“he was God’s instrument in bringing those
“mighty things to pass, which, undoubt-
“edly, no man living had, of himself,
“either wisdom enough to foresee, or un-
“derstanding to contrive, or courage to at-
“tempt, and execute.”*

BUT it is to be lamented, that neither prince nor people were reformed or improved by the corrections they had undergone, or the mercies now received. To security, ease, and plenty, succeeded luxury and lewdness, the most avowed profligacy, and the most daring impiety. And here again, the most

* Clarendon’s History of the Rebellion, Vol. 6. p. 708, 9.

most prejudiced eye must see the righteous hand of God interposing by pestilence, by fire and sword to chastise the crying enormities of this reign. An honest Pagan would have seen this interposition, and would have ascribed to the providence of the gods, what a modern moralist and enlightened philosopher may charge upon chance, the course of nature, or the working of the human passions.

WE abound with histories of England, upon which every reader must make his own comment, and apply to the subject in hand; for an honest, a moral, an impartial history of England,---a history constructed on Pagan principles, and confined to facts, characters and moral reflections, is yet wanting among us. And whenever such a history shall appear, the history of Providence will appear the most interesting and instructive part of the work; and we shall see a nearer and juster moral connection between effects and causes, than is at present discernible in

the vulgar, partial page of history. For instance; a modern historian's reflection upon the conclusion of the peace with Spain in the year one thousand seven hundred and forty-eight, is as follows. "What then
"were the fruits which Britain reaped from
"this long and desperate war? A dreadful
"expence of blood and treasure, disgrace
"upon disgrace, an additional load of griev-
"ous impositions, and the national debt
"accumulated to the enormous sum of
"eighty millions sterling."*

SOME future historian, who shall write with the principles of an honest pagan, not to please and flatter a party, and not to load the character and memory of a ministry, but to instruct his countrymen, and to improve the stock of national virtue and piety, will account for this unhappy conclusion of the war, as a just reward and signal retribution of the immoral commencement of it, attend-
ed

* Smollet's History of England, Vol. xi. p. 304.

ed as it was with the insolence of victors, with acclamations of triumph, with festivity, jollity and universal riot.

WE see and acknowledge the Hand of Heaven in chastising the presumption, and humbling the pride of the Persian monarch, of Athens in her Sicilian expedition, and of Philip the second in his attempts against England: and he must be a bigot indeed, who seeing the same effects the consequences of the same causes, shall ascribe to chance, or the mere operation of nature or agency of man in one case, what in a similar case he acknowledges as the interposition of God. A Spaniard hath as much reason to insist Heaven on his side in our discomfiture this war, as we have to ascribe the defeat of the Invincible Armada to the favour and interposition of the same Heaven.

THE season, when this peace, so dishonourable to Britain, was negotiating, is

G 4. some-

something remarkable. It was "at a time,
" says the same modern historian, when their
" affairs," that is, of England and her Allies,
" began to wear the most promising aspect;
" when the arrival of the Russian Auxilia-
" ries would have secured an undoubted
" superiority in the field; when the British
" fleet had trampled on the naval power of
" France and Spain, intercepted their sup-
" plies of treasure, and cut off all their re-
" sources of commerce." *

Now as we are willing to think better
of human nature than to suppose, that ei-
ther treachery or ignorance could lead the
British ministry to act the preposterous part
they are here charged with in making the
peace, we cannot account for it otherwise
than by ascribing it to a judicial infatuation,
or a just judgment from heaven; that they
should betray this timidity and precipitation
in concluding the war, who had expressed
fo

* Do. p. 303, 4.

DISCOURSE III. 89

so much arrogance, insolence and presumption in the commencement of it.

Thus perhaps some future historian may reflect, who writes to flatter no party or passion, influenced only by public affections, and a disinterested and philosophic spirit; but we need not rest the proof of God's moral attributes and administration on refinement and conjecture, on dubious reasonings and equivocal appearances. The fate and fortunes of every nation under heaven, of whose history we have a competent knowledge, bear ample testimony to this awful truth; "that God reigneth over all, "and that his judgments, like his mercies, "are over all his works."

AND here we may not improperly appeal to the ancient Jewish prophets, not as of Divine Authority, (for we need to beg nothing on this question with the unbeliever,) but in point of history and matter of fact; and of the reasoning and arguments, which
may

may be occasionally deduced from the subject of their prophecies. The twenty fifth chapter of Jeremiah contains denunciations of the Divine Wrath against the most distinguished nations of the then known world. In the thirty second verse it is said; “ Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth.” Has not this been verified in fact? Trace back the history of the nations here threatened, and if it may not seem to be wrote in blood, yet it certainly presents us with nothing at this time, but monuments of ruin. How will the unbeliever account for this upon his own principles of the moral rectitude of man? Or, what but a general depravity could call for such general devastation? Could a God of mere mercy, without judgment and justice be the Author of this tragedy; or can we say, that no moral attributes

butes appear in this tremendous scene? The God of Moses commanded but the destruction of seven nations, but here you have all the distinguished nations of the earth under the same sentence,

WE need not insist upon it as a truth of revelation, that natural blessings are promised and annexed to religious obedience, and denied to the disobedient; but we affirm from observation and general experience, that this moral administration and distinction is the establishment of God in nature, and still takes place in the course of the world, and the history of mankind. Look at the sufferings, or rather punishment of the different nations of the world, from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah to that of Jerusalem, and it proclaims aloud that God is righteous, and man is wicked,

DIS-

DISCOURSE IV

A GENERAL ORDER OF AMMUNITION, and
 what is called a General Provision,
 admitted by many who deny all particular
 propositions, and upon the matter, reference
 be printed, the actual and active govern-
 ment of the

DISCOURSE IV.

ACTS xvii. 28.

In him we live, and move, and have our being.

A GENERAL order of nature, and what is called a general Providence, is admitted by many who deny all particular interpositions, and upon the matter renounce the present, the actual and active government of God.

LET

LET us then examine this important question asserted by revelation, by the lights which nature, reason, and religion hold out to us, and see whether the proofs of it are not such as may and ought to determine a reasonable being.

I. IT is some presumption in favour of this doctrine, that it is as ancient as the existence of mankind, and I had almost said as universal : and an opinion of so early a date, and of so extensive a spread, cannot well be supposed without some foundation in truth and nature.

I SPEAK not here of the Jewish records and dispensations, with which the history of a particular Providence is so interwoven as to make it their main substance and contents : but if we refer to the earliest writers of profane history, we observe this doctrine as firmly admitted, as it is in Moses and the Prophets.

THE

THE history of the Gentiles, in respect of their general knowledge and practice, is indeed the history of folly and fable, of vice and error, of passion unbridled, and philosophy run mad: yet amidst the common ignorance and common corruption, a light was still held out from heaven, directing man to the acknowledgment of a Supreme Governor and Providence of the world: and the course of nature still preserved its manner and rule, in punishing vice and rewarding virtue. The same supreme truth has been generally held, and is still held among the several religions of the world, however differing in other respects: and the same course of nature still holds on, and speaks the same language to all the nations of the earth; by which God still asserts his agency and power, which are generally acknowledged amidst the various errors of superstition, and the corruptions of other divine truths.

AND here we may observe a remarkable difference between the impositions of men,
and

and the doctrines of God, or those sentiments of religion which we derive from nature, sacred tradition, and divine authority. The former are variable and confined, as the genius of the legislator, or the state for which he plans, or the people upon whom he imposes : but the latter are uniform, run through all ages and orders of men, through all climates and every period of time : Greek and Barbarian, bond and free, the tyrant and the slave, all retaining the great and striking doctrine of a Divine Providence ; and the politician himself is not unawed by it, though he should have despised it, had he been in the secret of the cheat. Thus prayer, which is a duty founded on the doctrine of a Divine Providence, is the general practice of mankind, and has been ; while the objects, to which it has been directed, have been various. In Homer's Works you have different deities classed on different sides ; one part of heaven favouring the Greeks, the other the guardians of Troy ; yet both Greeks and Trojans acknowledged the Supreme Government

DISCOURSE IV. 97

ment of God over all. You have again different religious rites observed by different nations: yet the end of all is the same; to avert the vengeance, and obtain the favour of Heaven.

HOMER is allowed on all hands to be the most ancient author of the pagan world; his adherence to truth and nature, or strict regard to the manners of the times and persons he describes, is reckoned one of his greatest excellencies. Now the reigning sentiment in him is the superior agency of the gods, and their constant presence with mankind. Every thing on earth is assigned to the direction and influence of heaven; not only the elements and general course of nature, but its peculiar blessings, and the desolations it sometimes suffers, are ascribed to the Divine Favour, as reconciled, or averted. What others call chance or fortune, is by Homer's personages, I think, constantly deduced from the will of heaven. The scales of victory rise or sink, empires

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fall

fall and all nature trembles at the nod of Jove. Nor are individuals less his concern, than the general body; particular deaths, particular deliverances, personal accomplishments, civil and military, personal endowments, as strength or beauty, whatever is happy or miserable on earth, is regularly deduced from the administration above. Even the good thought is not our own. What is more remarkable to our purpose, is that the moral attributes are every where admitted in the Divine Administration. The ravages of war, of fire or flood, are sent as judgments upon the vices of mankind, while the just and pious are, even in general desolations, the peculiar care of heaven; thither scarce one prayer ascends unanswered, or ungranted, while the arrow shot, the race run, the wall built without the proper sacrifices and prayers, are certainly unsuccessful, and disappoint the views of the impious undertakers and contenders.

WHENCE, I would ask, could these sentiments

DISCOURSE IV. 99

timents arise, so familiar to the age of Homer, or to the age of which he wrote, if they had no foundation in truth or nature?

IN Herodotus and the other historians who succeeded him, both Greek and Roman, who wrote in the spirit of antiquity, who were not diverted from truth, from common sense, from the simplicity of nature and natural manners by faithless policy, refinement or infidel principles, even down to Cæsar, though he was esteemed an epicurean, you observe a particular Providence admitted, and distinguishing on signal occasions the virtuous and vicious by reward and punishment. Among the inhabitants of the new world as well as of the old, you find temples and altars engaging the common devotion: and perhaps that nation of barbarians is yet to seek, which in opinion and practice has renounced the care and protection of heaven. * The first inhabitants of

H 2 the

* Cura pii Diis sunt, et qui coluere, coluntur.

Ovid, L. 8, l. 724.
THIS

the world were certainly not philosophers enough to deduce this opinion from abstracted and metaphysical reasoning on the attributes of God : they must have been facts, or some venerable and sacred authority that first impressed this truth ; or nature sensible of

THIS has the moral turn of a proverb, and may be considered, as a maxim in the gentile world arising from the observation of ages ; and though here applied to a particular case of a providential interposition, in favour of two religious persons, delivered from the vengeance that overwhelmed an impious race, yet proceeds upon an opinion, that seems general to the whole race of men.

IT was a common opinion among the heathens, however wrong directed or applied, that their prosperity arose from the favour, and their distress from the displeasure of the gods ; and that both were the immediate consequence or just retribution of their obedience or disobedience to the divine commands. And you will scarce find a person recorded by historian or poet as signally unfortunate, whose character is not described as signally wicked, and particularly a despiser of the gods, and their supposed oracles : as the victorious hero, or successful expedition, is generally ascribed to the favour of Heaven, procured by obedience to the oracle, and a due performance of the sacred rites. Thus the belief of a particular Providence is the common sentiment that runs through the history of the gentile world.

of her wants and infirmities, fled to heaven for relief and protection: and a kind of instinct gave rise, or an easy reception to this doctrine first established by authority, and afterwards handed down by tradition: but whatever might be its foundation, it had certainly never maintained its ground against the common sense and general experience of mankind: and an opinion so general, I say not universal to avoid disputes, certainly deserves some respect as the voice of nature herself, first received from, and afterwards echoing back, and reporting from age to age, through all the nations of the earth, the voice of God.

NOR let this common consent of mankind, alledged in favour of a Divine Providence, be esteemed among the vulgar errors, the superstitious and absurd opinions of paganism, since the best and wisest philosophers, the Platonists and Stoics,* maintained the
H 3 same

* Particularly Seneca and Antoninus.

same opinion ; as is evident to any one who is but moderately acquainted with their works, and has been abundantly made to appear by several learned writers on this subject.*

BUT I dwell not on this argument, as others less liable to be disputed call for our consideration,

II. THE common consent of mankind seems on this, as on some other divine and moral subjects, to fall in with the truth, the reason and reality of things : and though the language and arguments, by which this opinion has been maintained, have some of them the school-men's air,† yet they are, we think, capable of the most rational demonstration.

MATTER,

* See particularly Gregory on God and Providence.

† CREATURARUM essentia nullam in suo conceptu involvit existentiam : Unde ex eo quod hoc momento sint, non sequitur sequenti momento esse futuras.

Pictet. Theolog. Xtian. p. 395.

DISCOURSE IV. 103

MATTER, we lay it down as an indisputable maxim, had its existence from God. Matter *in esse*, or in being, had no more will or power to direct, than it had to bring itself into being. It would require the same power to move, as to make it. Let the Almighty Fiat then give it motion as well as essence: its motions must be blind and senseless as matter itself, without the same Power to direct, that gave it motion. Suppose then matter moving in just measure, and to serve reasonable ends, every future moment of such motion is as much guided by the Hand of God, as the first: for imagine but matter in any instant of time left to itself, and under no direction from a Superior Mover,* and it would move as

H 4

mere

* A POWER is not only necessary to impress the motion (upon matter) at first, but it must act incessantly to keep it up to one constant pitch. The force or energy of every single impulse of this cause *ab extra* is extinguished in whole or in part by the action and reaction of the moving particles of the system, the last always consuming the first, as well as being equal to it; so that the motion would soon cease altogether, without the indefinited action of the original power.

Baxter's Enquiry into the Immortality of the Soul,
Vol. I. p. 130. and see Vol. II. p. 30.

mere matter, that is, as a blind and senseless mass: or suppose further, matter left to itself and unsupported by a Superior Power, it would cease to be. "Let there be light, and there was light," is a command, a cause and an effect, which operate mutually at this instant, as strongly as they did at the first Fiat of the Creator. Let God withdraw his mandate, and darkness and old night would reassume their ancient empire, and nature shrink into nothing. All being had its rise from the first Being, and all motion from the first Mover. Existence, life and motion are all distributed in various degrees to different beings, conspiring in their several uses to carry on the general plan of Providence,

BUT could not God, it may be still said, originally impress such a quantity of motion on matter, give such powers to nature, and faculties to man, as were sufficient for their future existence and exercise, and for the preservation of the material, animal, and
rati-

DISCOURSE IV. 105

rational world, without any constant and repeated impressions or particular interposition.

THE objection carefully considered answers itself. Every motion of matter, or power of nature, or faculty of man exerted for any future period of time, in consequence of an original designation and act of God, is as much every instant of that period, the act of God as the first. A note of music in its dying fall bespeaks the hand that first touched the key; and the silence of the note, is but a consequence of the master's inaction; whose impulse gives length or shortness, that is, a longer or shorter existence to the note. The javelin aimed at David by Saul, and the arrows shot by Jonathan as a signal for his friend's escape, continued just so long and no longer, than the impulse given by either hand prevailed.

APPLY this to existence as well as motion; the one is no more essential to matter than

than the other. Necessary existence can belong to no other but God, who gives being to the whole creation. The vigour imparted to the arrow from Jonathan's arm ceasing, the motion ceased: and God withdrawing his creating Power, the matter as well as motion would cease. Independency cannot be ascribed to a creature without absurdity. The sun, from its first glorious appearance to this good day, never shed one ray of light by any intrinsic power, or inherent virtue of its own. Suppose but (for once an impossibility) God for one day, or one hour not existing; the Creator but for one moment withdrawn from creation; is it possible to conceive nature living without a principle of life, and being still flowing from no fountain? As well might we suppose light and heat equally and regularly dispensed as at present, "with sun
"and stars in mid sea sunk." To suppose the creature in any period of its duration self-existent, is to ascribe to it the omnipotence which first called it into being. There
must

must be allowed a chain of causes and effects, extending from earth to heaven, the first link supported by the throne of God; suppose any one of these links unconnected and independent, it must drop into nothing and leave a void in nature. But suppose further the throne vanishing, and the first link deprived of its hold, all the chain of causes and effects must drop with the first cause, and all nature become a void.

To suppose God, not existing, or not preserving the world, amounts to the same thing. If the creation can exist and live without a God supporting it, it may do the same without a God in being: for no God, and a God not acting, are the same. If the world can subsist without, and independent of his power, it may do the same without his being. He may as well not be, as be to no purpose: he may as well be out of the world, as unconcern'd in the world. If the universe can for one moment exist of itself,
it

it may do the same for millions of years. Nay, I dare affirm, if it can preserve, it might create itself: for self-existence in any moment of time is equal to self-creation: and God's power withdrawn from created beings, or not exerted in their creation, is the same thing. If beings exist without a God after creation, they might have done the same before, or without it. We hence conclude the following pious address to be no less true in philosophy, than it is good in divinity: "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth: thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust."

3. THE mere support of nature is not the only evidence of a Divine Providence: the order, the course, and regular succession and arrangement of the natural and moral world proclaim the same truth. There is plainly a general order and regularity, which has existed for some thousands of years, and second
causes

causes have operated uniformly: from whence a God of order is manifestly inferred: behold the sun, the moon and stars never weary, nor wandering in their courses: winter and summer succeeding to each other, and the harvest producing the fruits in its season? Have the seas forgot to ebb and flow, or the shades of night to succeed to the labours and heat of the day? Do the rivers forsake their beds at will? Or is the ocean permitted to leave its bounds, and to wander at large over the face of the earth? Has nature, shall we say, any will of its own, to guide its course, and direct its motions? Does the sun know when to arise, or when to descend: when to recede from, or when to advance to the poles? Or does the sea prescribe to itself its just limits, how far it shall go and no farther? The order and regularity observable in our own material system, and observed in other material systems of being, as plainly proclaim a ruling government, and Supreme Governor, as disorder and irregularity must have inferred no ruling

ruling principle or providential administration? The most vulgar understanding cannot but comprehend what mischief the sun's nearer approach, or farther recess from the earth, a stronger impression upon a tide, or the tempest raging with double force, or a small augmented tumult by sea or land, the want or failure of one element, or one season of the year, one summer or harvest (things which might easily fall out, were there no providential government and Governor of the world) must occasion among the inhabitants of the earth.

ANOTHER proof or instance of the perpetual agency of a Divine Providence is the constant preservation, or as we might call it, the repeated renovation of creatures, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate in the creation of God; the kinds of which you see perpetually, and as we may say eternally preserved, while the individuals are daily perishing: and notwithstanding the almost infinite consumption of the creatures, by
necessary

DISCOURSE IV. III

necessary use, by abuse, by waste and extravagance, you will scarce find any deficiency, but where it is by way of extraordinary interposition, and providential correction, to make man sensible of his blessings, and to reduce him to sobriety, moderation, and pious gratitude in the use of them.

THE eye, methinks, at first sight, or an understanding unprejudic'd, upon the first survey of this world of wonders, shou'd acknowledge its great Author and Support. Explore with still more attention the heights and depths, the seasons and elements of nature, and comprehend as much as you can of its immensity, and you will find nothing less than Deity adequate to the work of administering this complicate and immense machine. It is something amazing to see and observe the numerous inhabitants of the globe, in this and every preceding age, furnished with a sufficient supply of the necessaries of life, where their own sloth and idleness, or imprudence or impiety, have not deprived them

them of these common blessings of heaven. Mark the crouded town; see the extensive city pouring forth its thousands and ten thousands: extend your view from city to city, from kingdom to kingdom, from one region to another: recollect, if you can, all the children of nature, all the families of the earth, with the inhabitants of the several regions and elements, all fitted with proper organs, and provided with suitable nourishment; and say, if any thing less than a Divine Hand, could thus fill all things living with plenteousness.

It is worth observing, that notwithstanding the prodigality, the rapacity, and tyranny of a great part of mankind, few or none are left without a proper support and provision equal to the demands and wants of nature, where it is not their own fault; nay, so gracious and abundant is heaven in its provision for the human race, that in the same city we may see thousands of lazy sluggards supported without working, and in a way that might almost

DISCOURSE IV. 113

almost seem a reproach to Providence and religion.* But to render this indolence inexcusable and almost impossible, we may observe as another instance of Providence, the various wants and necessities of mankind, and the provision that is made for a supply of those wants, by the various arts and occupations carried on in the world. Cast your eyes into the Metropolis of this Kingdom, and you see thousands, and ten thousands engaged in one employment or other, and still new matter arising for the subject of our labour and our subsistence, after all the toil expended by former generations. The cultivation of the earth would be far from suffi-

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I

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* THE number of the Lazaroni or black-guards of Naples are said to be six thousand; not one of which ever lies in a bed, but upon bulks, benches, &c. in the open street: and what is scandalous, they are suffered to sun themselves, a great part of the day, under the palace walls. The convents of Naples are very rich, and make a practice of distributing broth and bread, once a day, to those who apply for charity; and it is by this charity that the Lazaroni principally subsist.

Sharp's Letters from Italy. p. 102, 3.

cient to exercise the capacities and abilities of the great body of mankind; to supply this defect, you observe new projects arising with every rising age, new truths explored, and old ones defended, new arts invented and old ones improved, new manufactures set on foot, new branches of commerce encouraged, new ports opened, new roads planned, new wars entered into, new regions discovered, and provinces extended, and man still as busy in this as in any former age.

GENERAL Providence and general law, respecting the general wants and common uses of mankind, will be allowed to be the basis of things, necessary to the human race. But if there are instances of extravagance and dissipation, there certainly

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DISCOURSE V.

PSALMS 24. 1.

*The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness
thereof: the world, and they that dwell
therein.*

A GENERAL Providence and general laws respecting the general wants and common uses of mankind, must be allowed in the nature of things as necessary and most expedient. But if there are instruments and second causes (as there certainly are)

are) in the administration of nature ; yet the first mover and prime agent is and must be God. If there is a ladder reaching from heaven to earth, on which angels ascend and descend; yet "God who dwelleth on high" stands above it, and asserts his supremacy as the Origin of every movement, the Author of every blessing, and the sole Guardian of his servants.

WHETHER God acts mediately by a course of nature originally established, or immediately and constantly according to the various conduct of free agents, may be a question in philosophy, but can be none in theology ; it may admit some debate with respect to the natural, but must be allowed one of the most plain and certain conclusions in the moral system. A philosopher may hesitate, but a believer cannot.

THE history of the Bible is from beginning to end a proof of the Divine Agency, perpetually interposing by mercies and judgments

ments, to reward and punish the different conduct of mankind. The deadly destruction, and overthrow “ of Sodom and Gomorrah and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities,” are described as the immediate and memorable act of heaven. Had it been otherwise, that is, a natural calamity only, who would have been deterred from their crimes by their punishment?

AGAIN what natural effect has idolatry on the constitution? So that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation? Or, why not to the eighth or tenth, if it is all the work of nature?

SUPPOSE the general deluge, to be the consequence of a prior disposition in all the elements, that contributed to it without the immediate direction and agency of a just and holy God, and the whole morality of this awakening lesson is lost, and the history of the Bible discredited.

THE duties of religion, particularly that of prayer, which is so much and so frequently recommended both by precept and example in the Book of God, would be a fruitless labour. For, do the nature of things hear? Will the winds abate their violence; will fire and water forego their nature, or the sun stand still to deliver the supplicant from imminent danger, or crown him with safety and victory? "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee:" does nature say this, or God? Or, is nature any thing but the disposition of God, a dead unactive mass without his influence, and blind and wandering without his guidance or direction? Besides the absurdity, the unphilosophical absurdity of supposing God not present with all his works; what a damp would it be on the morals of mankind? What encouragement to impiety, and what a check to heroic virtue, to suppose God not an inspector? To suppose him acting by a deputy; and delegating nature to supply his absence?

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DISCOURSE V. 119

“YE shall know that I am the Lord,” so frequently repeated, when God brings his judgments on the earth, is sufficient proof to the believer, that God acts not always by natural causes, or any pre-established harmony, but is himself immediately the Author and Executioner of these judgments, which would otherwise lose much of their terror, and be less operative on our faith.

WHEN David saw the angel of the Lord by the threshing-floor of Araunah, with “his hand stretched out upon Jerusalem to “destroy it,” would not this be more awakening and alarming to the penitent monarch, than any argument could possibly be, that his people died by some disposition in nature, and prior order in the constitution of things.

YET to our surprize, after the clearest testimony given by the sacred records to the actual and ever-active Providence of God, we have observed some persons distinguishing themselves, as strenuous advocates for

what they call the pre-established harmony; an opinion, which though it may seem to have some probability from the appearances of nature, and some plausibility from the reasoning of philosophy, is as utterly subversive of all religion, prayer, and devotion, as the grossest atheism: for it takes away all Presence and Providence of God; and Epicurus does no more. Let the believer reflect on this, and let us return to the philosopher.

THE Theist admits, as every rational Theist must do, God to be the Creator of the World: they allow to God all possible, all conceivable perfections; infinite wisdom to contrive, and infinite power to execute a plan fitted to answer all future cases and contingencies. The work is finished, and the Creator according to them is discharged from all future care and labour; what place, we ask, do they now assign for his residence, and what employment for his attributes? Is he less infinite than before? Less wise or less power-

powerful, or is he abridged of any attributes of Deity? The Universe, they say, is his residence. The residence, we say, of what? Of supreme goodness to intend, of infinite wisdom to contrive, and of infinite power to effect nothing? A God residing every where and no where, with no attributes, or with attributes unexercised; a God without activity, or without actual existence, amounts to the same thing, to a mere name and a nothing. Thus their rational scheme of Theism ends in downright Atheism; as no God, and a God without attributes and activity; no God, and a God slumbering on the Throne of Heaven; no God, and a God respecting no part of his Creation; no God, and no exertion or exercise of his Divine Attributes are the same thing; and is as absurd in philosophical speculation, as it is destructive of practical devotion, and of all true faith and virtue among mankind.

God as a Creator, might seem to have given up that title, had he left his works after their first formation, to time and accident,

to

to chance and fortune: the very idea of a Creator implies care and regard for the things he has created: and if the multitude or the minuteness of the creatures is urged against a Providential Regard to them, the same might be equally urged against their divine original formation. The wisdom of the Creator must be acknowledged in bringing so much art, and exquisite mechanism into so small a compass, as many of the minims of nature are; and can it discredit the Creator to regard the works of his own hands? Or, is not the amazing work shewn in the make, a presumption of God's future care in the support of his creatures? Did not the divine operation appear in the formation, we might plausibly exclude it from interposing in the preservation of things.

To say that God regards the superior parts of his works, or the more noble parts of his creation only, is derogatory to his perfections; for the whole is his workmanship; and the least not more absent from his presence,

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DISCOURSE V. 123

sence, and not less a part of his universe, than the greatest.

IT is from our own limited powers and imperfect capacities, that we judge, when we conceive of any thing as too hard for God; as it is mere pride that suggests any thing as too mean and insignificant for the Divine Inspection. The glory of God's attributes is as conspicuous in the minutest, as in the largest bodies, in the composition and structure of a fly or a mite, as in the formation of a world, or of systems of worlds. The minims of nature then, if they were not below God's notice in creation, cannot be thought unworthy of preservation; before existence they had no right to claim any thing; but creation gave them a title to the care of their Maker.

MAN's not regarding lesser things from an attention to greater, is no subject of praise, but a proof of his infirmity. God's glory is seen in his universal knowledge and
unlimited

unlimited power. The more particular his care is of his creatures, the more extensive is his goodness, the more glorious is his power. The particular regard paid to the creatures, which the Epicurean thought detracted from, does really add to God's glory.

THE variety and almost infinite number of beings that croud or compose this universe, are so far from being an objection to a Divine Providence, as subjecting it to too great a multiplicity of concerns, that a system any less than we know or imagine it, had been juster foundation for objection, as not allowing room for the display of infinite perfections. The universe comprehending worlds above worlds, and systems beyond systems, and connecting eternity with time, is alone a theatre worthy of God. Of what numberless and minute parts is the body of man composed; yet all at the suggestion of a thought. And cannot that Infinite Spirit, which pervades, fills and animates the universe, with equal ease and expedition give rest

or motion to the different springs of nature ? The world is indeed but “ as the drop of a “ bucket, and as the small dust upon the “ balance” in the Hands of Omnipotence.

THE more you enlarge the world, and multiply its inhabitants and parts, the more you render it an object worthy of the regard and providential inspection of an Infinite Being. In proportion as you contract the theatre of the world, or the universe of beings, you contract the power, and diminish the honour and attributes of God. Nothing less than an infinite object, or an infinity of objects seem suited to the comprehension and government of an Infinite Creator : a narrower province had suited the capacity and superintendence of a finite and mortal being. Our insufficiency and incapacity make us very unequal judges of the power and perfections of an Infinite Being : our views are only general ; whence must arise confusion in our sentiments and ideas of objects, the superficies of which

we

we are only acquainted with: but God sees and regards all things distinctly and intimately. An atom in the eye of Omniscience is as plain as a world; and every private member of a community is as clear to his view as the most extensive kingdom. Parts are seen around and substantial as a whole, and the whole with the distinction and precision of a part, by Him who is equally every where present: infinite power then must extend to all things possible: infinite wisdom to the knowledge of all things, their proper effects, designation, uses and ends: and shall we say that supreme goodness will not have a regard to the good of the whole system of beings; and the Creator be unconcerned for the well-being of his creatures? The same goodness that prompted him to create, must incline him to preserve: nor can that wisdom and power, which he displayed in the first formation of things ever desert him, who is eternal as well as infinite: all the attributes displayed in the creation of the world, are therefore, we conclude,

conclude, exerted every moment for its preservation.

AFTER what has been above observed of the nature of God, and his attributes, little need be added in answer to the following objection: it is we conceive, already answered: but let us hear the philosopher in his own words. "The theory of
" God's perpetual acting diminishes, in-
" stead of magnifying the grandeur of those
" attributes, which they affect so much to
" celebrate. It argues surely more pow-
" er in the Deity to delegate a certain de-
" gree of power to his inferior creatures,
" than to operate every thing by his imme-
" diate volition: it argues more wisdom to
" contrive at first the fabrick of the world
" with such perfect foresight, that, of itself
" and by its own operation, it may serve
" to all the purposes of Providence, than if
" the great Creator were obliged every mo-
" ment to adjust its parts, and animate by
" his

“his breath all the wheels of that stupendous machine.” *

I CANNOT perceive that the opinions of God's perpetual agency can at all diminish the grandeur of his attributes : surely his power is not lessened, by supposing all creatures in every instant of their existence depending upon their Creator for their being ; to imagine that they might be and act independent of him, is supposing effects without a cause, at least an adequate cause ; it would destroy our reverence for God's authority, our piety and his praises. A law unalterable like that of the Medes and Persians, could not be expressive of God's wisdom. Wisdom consists in fitting means to ends ; but no process of nature, of original establishment and uniform agency, could be suited to the conduct of moral and free agents. Besides, what grandeur of attributes, in a Deity who exercises none, and there-

* Hume's Essays on the Idea of Power, p. 116.

therefore might as well have no attributes?

BUT to be more particular on this objection, which has an air of plausibility and reverence to the God-head; we need only ask a plain man, who has not bewildered himself, and attempted to bewilder mankind, and to banish common sense out of the world by sophistical subtlety, and metaphysical refinement; we might I say, ask such a plain man, whether to abridge the Deity of some of his attributes, (for the philosopher here has had no regard to goodness and mercy, to righteousness and holiness, though not less apparent in the administration and frame of the natural and moral world than his wisdom and power) and to limit and confine the exercise of the rest, and to make the Creator share a divided empire with his creatures, is to consult the grandeur of those attributes, and the dignity of his empire?

AN antient Persian might perhaps in devotion to his God the sun, and the more to advance the glory of his lustre, allow his influence on the mountain oak, or the stately cedar, but deny it to the humble shrub, and the lilly of the valley; or confine his light to imperial cities and the palace of his prince, while he forbade it to shine on the cottage of the peasant, or the tent of the wandering Arab, lest the purity of his beams should be tainted by the noisome smoke of the steams arising from the camel's dung; but nothing surely could more discredit the manly reasoner and the philosopher, than such a childish fancy. An ambitious minister might attempt to persuade his royal master, that to confine himself to his seraglio with his courtezans, or to employ his vacant hours in his closet like the imperial butcher in killing flies, and to leave the care and government of the provinces, as below his notice, to the administration of bashaws and lieutenant governors, would redound most to the dignity of his character and the
glory

glory of his reign: but the patriot, the philosopher, and the honest statesman would hold out to him different sentiments and a different language. "There is nothing," says one of the best writers of the age, "more beautiful in theory, than a prince attending to the movements of every minute wheel in the great machine of government; but the objects are too complicated, and he would be distracted by the multiplicity of views: to hear the complaints of the subject, and to examine things to the bottom, so as to decide in all cases with justice and moderation, would indeed be an illustrious task."*

A POWER derived from God to man, and exercised by him and other creatures both above and below him, no rational believer will, we suppose deny: but a self-existent being, a self-moving and independent principle

* Marmontel's *Belisarius*, p. 128.

ciple and power in the creatures, is what neither the believer, nor the true philosopher can admit. No creature, we conceive can live, and move, and have its being, beyond and out of the sphere of the Almighty, the all-perfect, all-present and infinite Creator. Would it, will you say, redound to the honour of a prince, that his subjects could live in security, peace and happiness, independent of his laws, and uninfluenced by his government? And would he consult the character and reputation of wisdom, should he place his subjects in such a state and condition, as would tempt them to assert their independence, reject his government and laws, and renounce all obedience?

THE force of a late writer's* argument in favour of the divine wisdom consists in this; that this wisdom is impeached in supposing it not to have established such an original constitution of things, as should supersede all future interpositions.

Now

* Mr. Hume.

Now revelation asserts, and the believer maintains, that "God saw every thing that he had made, and it was very good": but that no invariable course, or inviolable laws of nature have since taken place, is a fact which the philosopher must admit, as well as the believer: the latter can account for these variations in the course, and violations of the laws of nature, in consequence of his own principles, and in perfect consistency with the attributes of the God he adores: it is then incumbent on the unbeliever, who contends for a perfect original establishment, and yet must admit succeeding interpositions in the course of nature, to vindicate upon his principles the wisdom of God the Creator: and if God's presence with, and preservation of the world he has made, must detract from his wisdom, let our philosopher shew, that it would contribute more to the grandeur of the divine perfections, to suppose God wholly unconcerned for, and eternally absent from this stupendous machine, which upon the principles of an unbeliever,

lives, and moves, and has its being, unsupported by, and independent of its Creator. The interpositions supposed to succeed to the creation, and to detract from the wisdom of the Creator, are, we say, the necessary display of the divine attributes, and the constant efflux and agency of that God, who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Philosopher, say, if it would be more to the glory of God, to suppose, that from the first Fiat of creation, he had slumbered and slept? What you call interruptions and interpositions, alterations and amendments, we consider as the uniform effects of divine wisdom and rectitude, which can no more cease to operate in any instant of time, than God can cease to be. You (out of reverence to God's wisdom, and to save the honour of his attributes, which it seems must suffer by any present agency or interposition succeeding to creation) banish him out of the universe: by the same argument a fallen angel might expel him heaven; and any other order of beings, who preceded

ceded and saw the creation of this present system succeeding to their own, might upon the same argument, deny the Creator of the present world.

THIS objection therefore, which supposes the wisdom of God impeached by asserting the necessity of his constant support and animation of the whole, or of his interposition in the parts of this stupendous machine after the first Fiat of creation, draws after it, or infers this among many other absurdities; that blessings originally conferred, continued, and improved, and these in a way by which the minds of the persons blessed and benefitted are more affected with esteem and gratitude, with veneration and love for their benefactor, than they would have been under an uniform process and invariable system of nature, under which they must have soon forgotten, neglected or denied him (as the epicurean atheist does, upon this very principle) detract from the wisdom of such a Benefactor. But,

says this writer, the supposition of God being under a necessity of perpetually and occasionally interposing to support and animate the creation, is a supposition that detracts from the just idea of his wisdom, whereas he should have said from the just idea of his power, as not able or sufficient by the first act of creation to supersede the necessity of his future presence and interposition: but we cannot conceive a higher idea of this power, than its incessant, unlimited and infinite exercise and exertion through the universe of being; as its ceasing to act and to be every where, would argue imperfection, as implying a limited power and presence, or fatigue, or an avocation to other business and engagements, to several of which he could not attend at the same time. If you reply, that his wisdom is impeached in supposing that he did not foresee, and provide for all future contingencies by the first act of creation, we deny the supposition, and say that he did thus foresee and provide; and that

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a foresight and provision, such as you require of a God ever absent, and never appearing in his works, which must have been the consequence of a sameness in the process and system of nature, had argued a defect of that wisdom, in planning and executing such a system of creation, as had banished his power and presence, and the acknowledgment of his very Being from among his creatures.

It was objected to Jesus by his brethren; "there is no man that doth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly; if thou do these things, shew thyself to the world:" as if they had said, every one who expects from the public the reputation and credit of a Divine Mission, ought to give public proofs of that mission; if thou do the miracles reported of thee, shew thyself and them to the world. This argument is good, the reprehension would have been just, had there been here any occasion to address it to Christ; and the unbeliever's

believer's argument against the Being of a God, who did not manifest himself in his works, but had ordained all things to be carried on by an independent and uniform system and invifible operation of nature, would have been equally ftrong and unanfwerable.

THE wife man fpeaking of Providence, thus addreffes God, "Thou wouldeft not "that the works of thy wifdom fhould be "idle:" but this may be deemed apocryphal by the philofopher, yet the philofopher muft acknowledge, that God's hiding his wifdom in her beauty, would have been a ftrange way of manifefting it to the world.

II.

2. WE may be indulged in a few moral reflections by way of conclufion, in order to confirm the reasoning, and fentiments made ufe of in the preceding difcourfe.

THE opinion, that Divine Providence does
not

not extend its care to all things, is the most vulgar philosophy: it is in truth, a vulgar error; arising from a superficial view of things, and the observation of mere human powers and abilities. Man cannot attend to many things at once; what a consequence is hence deduced? therefore God cannot.

It is peculiarly debasing and contradictory to that very philosophy, whose discoveries of new systems of worlds extending far and wide in the boundless regions of the universe, are alledged as diminishing, or taking off the great Creator's attention to this our narrow globe: for the Infinite Power supposed in the production, implies more strongly the same Infinite Power in the preservation. While the system of creation was supposed more confined, the power of the Creator might with more seeming reason be supposed confined also; and his perfections measured by the short and limited effects produced by them: but an Universe peopled with worlds above worlds, scattered
from

from the Creator's hand, gives new glory to his attributes, wings our piety to bolder flights, opens new fields to our hopes, and affords firmer footing to our faith. A solitary globe inhabited only by one order of rationals, might seem to proceed from envy or impotence in the first Former: but a power or profusion of essence beyond human comprehension and knowledge, fills us with wonder, with joy and confidence, that we are the workmanship of such an Almighty Agent.

To suppose any part of creation remote from the presence of God, and that this globe of ours may be one of those thrown at a distance, and bordering on the regions of nothing, is going upon the supposition of a God finite; confined like the sun to his orb, and leaving the polar nations under the horrors of cold and darkness.

THE universe can be well considered in no other light, than as a subject for the exercise
of

DISCOURSE V. 141

of the Divine Attributes: nothing can be conceived as a proper employ for the Divinity, but an exertion of his powers, in a communication of life, motion, reason, spirit, and other higher qualities at present far above our comprehension, to an universe of beings. A perpetual display of wisdom, power, justice, holiness, goodness and mercy, may be supposed as a necessary efflux of Deity : and you may as well deny God to be, as deny him to be essentially wise, powerful, just, holy, good and merciful. Strike which of these you please out of his attributes, and you so far deny the existence of God ; nay, deny the actual exercise of any of these attributes for any given time, and you for that time banish God from the world. An inactive Deity is no better than a dead man, or a senseless image. God, it will be admitted, must be present in every moment of time, and in every portion of space, otherwise he would not be eternal and infinite. But eternity and infinity, the natural attributes,

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as we say, of the Deity, devoid of the moral, are no more than an extent of space and time unmeasurable, an infinite void, and no real existence, nor so much as a worthy subject of speculation to any reasonable being.

WHAT is the supreme infinite Being, according to the unbeliever, if he regard not the work of his own hands? What is he but infinite inactivity, infinite ignorance, and infinite emptiness of all moral good? Or, powerful to do nothing, knowing to see nothing, and wise to regard nothing; and respecting with equal eye, or with none at all, the virtues and vices, the prayers or blasphemies of mankind.

THERE is a manifest absurdity in this very supposition, that God should immediately after absolving the glorious work of creation, retire within himself, and abandon all thought and care of what he had produced. What is not worth a regard, was not
worth

worth a production; and the Deity might as well have existed without any creation, as a creation of which he takes no knowledge.

It may be a pleasure of a sort to hide from the world, to sleep in the shade, and free from the cares and business of life, to indulge to sense, or to the luxury of fancy. This may be an easy, but it is an infamous state, to discharge ourselves from the kind offices we might perform to our fellow-creatures, and the duties we owe to the public. But to ascribe this epicurean disposition to the Supreme Being, is to charge heaven with the infirmities of mortality; to give to spirit the appetites of sense, to infinite goodness the disposition to do evil, and to Almighty Power the faculty of doing nothing. Such a philosophy destroys both the natural and moral attributes of the Deity, and in fact banishes his very Being out of the world. What glory, or rather what infamy do we not fix upon God, when we represent him, as
 confi-

confined within himself, and guided by no other principles than those of self-love, and self-seeking? Take away goodness, wisdom and power, and you leave nothing great or Godlike in the Divinity. Should we call that man a worthy citizen, and honour with monuments and crowns, him who is absolutely careless of every civil office, and unconcerned though the republic was undone; who would not lend a hand to restore the liberty, to close the wounds, or procure the salvation of his bleeding country? And shall we term him a good God, or any God at all, and address with sacrifice and prayer Him who is entirely unconcerned with the conduct and affairs of mortals, unconnected with creation, and beholds not, or beholds with indifference, the ruin of surrounding worlds?

IF you say God governs things in general, and not in particular, you may as justly say he sees things in the same manner; that is, at large and universally, but not singly
and

and distinctly: but so far am I from ascribing such an imperfect government to God, that I believe his attributes to be extended far beyond all the limited portions of essence that we can conceive: and I think the Divinity would be debased, should we confine its agency and knowledge to every atom of this globe, with a "hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther." Not to know all things would argue ignorance and imperfection in God: extend the universe as far and wide as you please; compose it of parts the most minute, as well as of elements the most dissimilar; it is by giving life and motion and order to such an ample scene, that you can alone do honour to the Divinity. The more you contract the scene, the more you debase the God-head.

THE variety and distance of circumstances, persons and climes, may distract, or disturb a little mind, in the consideration: but God is alike present in every clime,

and to every person; and can no more be absent from any part of his creation, than he can deny himself: and if we admit that he is our God, we must upon the same principle admit, that he is the God of all the earth. No number of circumstances can extend beyond the comprehension of Him, who is omniscient. And if you say, that any one person or place, or the most minute object escapes his knowledge, you may as justly assert his ignorance of all: shew me that God can be absent any where, and I will demonstrate that he may be present no where. It is nothing but our narrow sphere of action confined to narrow bounds, and our sphere of existence limited to so measured and short a period, that misleads us in our notions of Him, who is infinite in his essence, and endless in his duration: it is our own limited power and knowledge that make us unequal to comprehend the Omnipotence and Omniscience of God.

At the same time that we deny, against
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the modern philosopher, the mere course of nature to be the only agent and instrument of Providence independent of the Infinite Author of nature; we maintain that the incessant power of a watchful Providence, is undeniably evident from the order, the regularity and continuance of the laws and works of nature, in their several spheres and departments; from the succession of seed-time and harvest, of summer and winter, of day and night. Reverse the present order; let but one link of the present chain of things be struck out of its place; one element altered or withdrawn, or one season suspended, and it must be attended with very dreadful, if not with fatal consequences; suppose, what is neither impossible nor improbable in a world under no Divine Administration, a stronger impression upon the sea, or the flood of a tide sometimes impelled to double its present height and extent, or the winds raging with double violence; suppose sometimes a month of rain or drought extraordinary; or the universal failure of one

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harvest;

harvest; let the earth deviate from her present orbit, and pursue a higher or a lower path, or a comet in its progress make an approach some degrees nearer to the earth; any of these, which chance might have easily brought about in the revolution of some thousands of years, must have occasioned devastation, if not total destruction to the earth and its inhabitants; and nothing less than the Hand of Omnipotence could have preserved the world and its various parts and operations in so much order and regularity through a succession of so many ages.

IF to this order and regularity of the natural world are objected the frequent fires and floods, unfruitful seasons and blasted harvests, earthquakes and tempests: the philosophical defenders of natural religion have abundantly answered this objection: and it may be sufficient here to observe what I think they have not observed; that such partial calamities are necessary in the government of the moral world, to shew

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man his dependence upon Heaven, and that no fatal necessity, or invariable and invincible chain of causes and effects has place in the universe : an opinion, which if established, would make God, if it admitted him at all, a necessary, and not a moral agent, and produce imprudence and impiety amongst mankind. But the all-wise God has by his Providence in the natural world, taken away all reasonable foundation for such an opinion, and such a practice. We have general laws and a general order in the natural world, to convince us that God is the Author and Preserver of the whole : and yet we see the laws of this natural order violated in almost every instance. We behold the comets take a different tract, and pursue a different course from the revolutions of the planetary orbs ; the sea overflows its bounds ; the steadfast earth trembles ; the harvests fail ; the air ordained for, and productive of the general health, proves baneful and infectious : by such interruptions we are taught in whose hands

the reins of government are; and under whose administration the empire of nature still remains; to preserve and enforce our dependence upon Heaven; to check our security and presumption; to promote our pious gratitude and modest joy in the best fortune, and to inculcate resignation, prayer and penitence in the worst.

IN the lesser world, as it is called, or in the body of man, you find the case much the same as in the system of nature more at large: the human body is allowed by all, “to be fearfully and wonderfully made;” the parts various and many, yet all admirably adapted to the ends and uses for which they were made; and that a failure or stoppage in any of these principal internal parts, would occasion misery, if not dissolution to the whole frame: this however is generally produced perfect and entire, to manifest to us the Author and Giver of life: yet bodies are sometimes born imperfect, as others are maimed by
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DISCOURSE V. 151

what is called accident; many impaired by abuse: hence we are taught to be thankful for our own general health and perfect soundness, and for our preservation from the accidents which have overtaken others, and to be careful and prudent in the use of those faculties we have seen others destroy by wantonness and excess. Thus the constitution of nature points out not only the Administrator, but a moral administration of Providence: and yet some unhappy philosophers, who profess to make nature their text, have deduced from it this perverse comment, that there are no moral attributes in the Author of nature; but the force of what they have urged on this occasion belongs to another place, and has been the subject of former discourses.

BESIDES the general course of nature here appealed to, and the constant provision thereby made for mankind, there is not, I suppose, that Individual living, who has sufficient capacity, and maturity of years to

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supply him with materials to reflect on the time he has past, who will not, besides the instances of Providence he has observed in the fortune and conduct of others, see singular instances of mercy, or merciful correction in his own life and history: he will upon just reflection find deliverances vouchsafed, dangers averted, favours conferred, and accidents though in appearance trifling, productive of great and momentous events: he will find sickness removed, wants relieved, and immoralities corrected; and frequently these instances of mercy and loving-kindness so timed, as to point out in the plainest manner the finger of God. And perhaps the best and strongest evidence of a particular Providence, would be the particular history of any one man's life, faithfully recorded by himself, supposing his sagacity equal to the work, and that he could write with as much fidelity and accuracy as Heaven dictated, and be as exact in observing, as Providence was gracious in bestowing its favours.

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THE history of mankind at large, or of men in general, with whom we have little intimacy or connection, must be in some passages of it, obscure, and perhaps inexplicable, from our ignorance of their real, their inward moral character, and other remote circumstances and connections, which God may have had chiefly in view in the dispensation of his Providence towards them: but we are better acquainted at home; and in examining ourselves, the nature, the order and consequences of our actions, and how they have been affected by the interposition of Providence, we cannot well be deceived; and he must be in a gross degree ignorant or inattentive, who does not observe, and is not in his conscience convinced of the righteousness of God's dealings towards himself.

BUT though the characters of a Divine Interposition are here most legible, as lying nearest to our inspection, yet God has not left himself and his Providence without
witness

witness in the history of the world at large; which the more it is examined, will afford us still more grounds for our faith on this subject.

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DISCOURSE VI.

ROMANS 8. 32.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?

OF all the arguments produced in proof of the Divine Providence, I conceive those brought from Revelation are by far the strongest, and the most irresistible. The proofs

proofs brought from reason alone, though sufficiently clear and convincing to an unprejudiced and philosophic mind, are not always level to the common capacity; and plausible objections will strike upon a superficial survey, which require for their solution a larger compass of thought, and more accuracy of reasoning than is generally the portion of the vulgar understanding; and if we have alledged the common sense of mankind in favour of this doctrine of a Divine Providence, this we presume has been more owing to authority and the faith of tradition falling in with the wants and infirmities of human nature, than to philosophic reasoning, which shews the propriety of God's application to mankind, on this as on other important points in the way of revelation.

I SHALL not here dwell on the history and authority of the Mosaic dispensation, as this it may be said was appropriated to the use of a peculiar people, and that it is not applicable

plicable to the common condition of mankind, as God now no longer acts by visible interpositions and angel-messengers ; but this only we may observe, that the Divine Attributes displayed, as here recorded in the special judgments and mercies to the righteous and to the wicked, are an everlasting memorial of the Divine Nature, which must be “ the same yesterday, to day, and “ for ever ; ” though it may manifest itself in different ways, according to the different circumstances of mankind ; and the truth of God’s righteous government and providential administration over the world being thus once established, requires no more any farther proof and establishment, than that we should expect a new Messiah, and new miracles to confirm his mission, in order to be convinced of God’s mercy, and concern for our redemption. And I may add, that such is the wisdom of God, and the effect of his dispensations, that faith in, and a familiarity with the holy scriptures, wherein these dispensations are recorded, will contribute

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tribute more to a just knowledge of the works and ways of Providence, and to a practice suited to such knowledge, than any acquaintance with all the learning and all the philosophy, that have been ever employed upon the subject.

BUT what I would chiefly insist upon in this place is, that the revelation and gospel of Jesus Christ is the fullest and strongest testimony of this important truth, the Providence of God. The authenticity and authority of the gospel history, and consequently the truth of the Divine Mission of Jesus, as foretold by prophecies, proved by miracles, and ratified by its miraculous propagation, never has been, nor I presume, ever will be contested by any competent and unprejudiced examiner.

TAKING therefore this for granted, we may observe

1. WHAT an important figure does man make in the scheme of Providence, and of
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how much concern he is in the regards of his Maker, planning for some ages, for some hundreds of years before, nay, almost from the foundation of the world, the great work of his Redemption? Or, can we conceive that a business of small importance, to which the law itself was only a preparative, and which had employed the patriarchs and prophets in its prediction, and in preparing the way before it? See heaven opening, and angels descending to celebrate the Birth of the Saviour of mankind: and can mankind themselves, “these redeemed of “the Lord,” be of no consequence in his eye, and below his notice and regard? Again, behold the Son of God, the Son of his love, leaving the bosom of his Father, and descending from a happiness and glory inexpressible and inconceivable, to be born of a woman, to take upon him the frailties of mortality, and submitting to fill one of the lowest stations in life in human appearance, to be calumniated as the worst of men, and crucified as the vilest of malefactors: reflect on such

such a scene ! The wonder of angels ! And then conclude if you can, that man, for whose sake all this was done and suffered, is below the notice, and unworthy the regards of the Father of angels and of men.

AGAIN, consider this Jesus as endued with power from on high, and exerting the arm of the Almighty in commanding and counter-acting the elements, and healing the various distempers of mankind by a touch or a word speaking, raising himself from the dead, and visibly ascending into heaven ; and can man, for whose sake such revolutions, as I may call them in heaven and earth were transacted, be of no consequence or consideration in the eye of his Maker ? This doctrine of the Cross was plainly propagated in opposition to the passions, the prejudices and powers of man combined to destroy it ; and this by means and instruments in all human views altogether insufficient and unequal to such a work, by men untutored in science, not
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armed with power, and strangers to policy ; and whose very principles obliged and confined them to the simplicity of truth in all their words; their actions and sufferings for the name of their crucified Master ; but we see them triumphing over all opposition, and the kingdoms of this world becoming successively the subjects of the true God, and the kingdoms of his Christ.

CAN a dispensation thus preceded by prophecies, which we may call miraculous, and attended by real miracles, not only in its promulgation, but in its propagation ; can a Revelation thus wonderful in its conception, in its birth and future growth, be any other than the great power of God ? Or, could this scheme of Redemption, in the carrying on of which, heaven, earth, God, and angels, and men were so eminently concerned, regard a creature of no price or value in the consideration and sight of heaven ? Or, may we not fairly conclude, that He who hath given us his Son Christ Jesus,

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will with him also freely give us all things; and that He who hath so abundantly ministered to us in things pertaining to godliness, will not be wanting to us in things pertaining to life? The Apostle seems not less rationally, than triumphantly to cry out, in a survey of this wonderful work of our redemption; "all things are yours; whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's,"

2. BUT after all, the strongest proof and assurance we have from the gospel-revelation, of the reality and certainty of God's providential government of his creatures, is the repeated affirmation of Christ himself in the several declarations he has made on this subject: nothing can be more clear and express to this purpose, or more full in favour of God's particular Providence than these words, which are addressed to his friends and followers: "Are not two sparrows

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“rows sold for a farthing? and one of them
 “shall not fall to the ground without your
 “Father. But the very hairs of your head
 “are all numbred” Now every proof
 brought in attestation of the character of
 Jesus as the Messiah, is equally a proof of
 the truth of his doctrines and declarations.
 The sincere believer hears his words as a
 voice from heaven, and can no more doubt
 of God’s perpetual superintendence and
 particular Providence in the conduct and ad-
 ministration of the affairs of this world,
 than he can doubt of the truth, and cer-
 tainty of the miracles and Divine Mission
 of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ. And
 he who would effectually deny and destroy
 all faith in, and the proofs of a Providence,
 has not only to set aside what is alledged
 from nature or general consent, and from
 reason in favour, and on the side of this
 faith, but he must likewise undertake to
 cancel the evidences of the christian reve-
 lation, and subvert the credibility of the
 Gospel. For, while Jesus is allowed to be

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the Messiah, “and a teacher come from “God,” characters, which as belonging to him, never can be shaken, while solid learning and a just logic obtain in the world, the doctrine of an over-ruling and ever-watchful Providence, must remain firm and unshaken.

THE history of the Gospel itself, if we had here time to examine it, is the history of a kind Providence during this period, conducting all things in the most perfect method, and by the most proper means, to that great and desirable end, the salvation of our souls. The history of the Jews, commencing from the time of Christ, and connected with their rejection of him, and his prophecies concerning them, and continued to their final overthrow by the Roman army, is one of those striking monuments of the Divine Interposition, which the rage of barbarism, and the bigotry and obstinacy of infidelity can never erase: Jerusalem, though dead, yet still speaketh; her awful
ruins

ruins raising their heads from the dust, still lift up their voice, and proclaim to all ages and nations of the surrounding world, THIS HATH GOD DONE.

THE conduct of Christ, considered as the Son of man and clothed with mortality, his fervent prayer, and entire submission to the will of his heavenly Father, speak his assured faith in the declarations he made to others; and his own example in this, as in other points, is the fairest copy, and strongest enforcement of his precepts. His conduct, as the Son of God, and sustaining the character of the Messiah, is an exhibition not only of the power, but of the Providence of God; and when we see him "healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and "casting out devils;" reproving the sinner, encouraging the penitent, lamenting the incorrigible, and weeping over Jerusalem upon the prospect of its future misery and ruin, we cannot help acknowledging; this

is God with us; the exercise of his Providence, and the display of his mercy.

THE whole system of redemption, is a system of mercy providentially interposed for the benefit and blessing of mankind; confirming our faith, and establishing our hopes and foundations stronger than those of nature; and proposing to us in the strongest and fullest light, objects of the last importance to our present peace and future happiness; by this merciful dispensation we find our wants relieved, our darkness banished, our infirmities supported, our fears allayed, our courage animated, our corruptions purged, and the several frailties of our nature supplied with proper remedies.

AND here we must add, that “the life and
“immortality brought to light through the
“gospel,” give new force to the arguments
brought from reason and nature, for our faith
in the Divine Providence. Many appear-
ances

ances in nature, and objections that might before have staggered our faith on this subject, are entirely removed. The sufferings of the righteous, and the triumphing of the wicked for a season, are shewn to be compatible with the superintendence of a just and good Providence: the existence of natural evil, as productive of moral good, and even the permission of moral evil, as serving more to display the mercy of God, are also justified upon the scheme of christian redemption. Above all, a plan of the present life considered on this scheme, as a preparatory stage for the eternal world, a stage on which the great Captain and Author of our salvation has exhibited the most shining example of heroic virtue, and a patient enduring of injuries, who went not up to joy before he suffered pain, and entered not into his glory before he was crucified: this view of a holy and gracious Providence for ever puts to silence the strongest objection that has yet been made against it, from the persecution

and sufferings which good men have undergone in the cause of God and goodness.

NOR hath God, since the time of this signal and extraordinary interposition by revelation, left himself without witness, or ceased the more to be our protector and governor, and the governor of the universe. We are now the more encouraged "to cry "Abba, Father ; " we have now surer access to God, and may with full assurance of faith draw nearer to the throne of grace ; God is now to be considered, not only as the universal Father of nature, but as our Father in Christ Jesus, pardoning our sins, and regarding us as the redeemed of his beloved Son. The God of grace is surely not less our God, than the God of nature ; but by the stronger expressions and assurances of mercy made to us in the gospel, we are drawn to adore, to trust, and to love him the more.

God indeed in the revelation of Christ
Jesus

Jesus principally respected our spiritual wants and the salvation of our immortal souls ; but to the arguments of nature and reason on the subject of a present Providence, Christ has added more clear and express declarations ; which as we before observed, have for their support and authority, all the accumulated evidence of the Gospel. But beside this, the arguments of Christ on this, as on other subjects, have in them a perspicuity and force more convincing than the most accurate and laboured reasonings of the philosophers of this world. “ If a son
 “ shall ask bread of any of you that is a fa-
 “ ther, will he give him a stone, or if he
 “ ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a
 “ serpent ? If ye then, being evil, know
 “ how to give good gifts unto your children,
 “ how much more will your Father which
 “ is in heaven give good things to them that
 “ ask him ? ” Nor is this promise of paternal goodness confined to spiritual blessings only : “ your father,” says the blessed Master to his disciples, speaking of the things
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of this world, “ knoweth what things ye
“ have need of: and again; God provideth
“ for the young ravens that call upon him:”
and “ if God so clothe the grafs of the
“ field, which to day is, and to morrow is
“ cast into the oven, how much more will
“ he clothe you, O ye of little faith ? ”

Nothing can be more expreffive of
God’s actual, ever-watchful and ever-work-
ing Providence, than that reply which
Chrift made to the Jews, who objected to
him his working miracles on the fabbath-
day, “ my father worketh hitherto;” as if
he had faid, when God refted from the
work of creation, he ceafed not from fup-
porting, protecting and providing for the
world he had made, but is ever engaged and
intent on thefe works of mercy to his crea-
tures on the fabbath, as on other days. In
the prayer which Chrift has prefcribed to
our constant ufe, he has directed us to ad-
drefs our heavenly Father; “ give us day
“ by day our daily bread; lead us not into
“ tempt-

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“temptation, but deliver us from evil.” And to this duty and confidence of prayer to God, we are encouraged by that awful concluding doxology: “for thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever and ever.” And here too let us conclude, that as “of him, and through him, and to him are all things, so, to him be glory for ever. Amen.”

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DISCOURSE VII.

JOB iii. 20.

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?

IT concerns us much to have just and proper notions of God; for such as we conceive him to be, such will be our devotion towards him: but we are much misled on this subject by appearances, or by
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not rightly apprehending the nature of our case, of our condition and situation in the world. Sometimes a gloomy temper of spirit, or an unhappy turn in our affairs disposes us to behold all things in a gloomy light. Peevishness and pride are fruitful sources of discontent and complaint against Providence; nothing is great or good enough for the proud; nothing is pleasing or palatable to the peevish; but perhaps the most common cause of discontent under the dispensations of Providence arises from observing the general misery of mankind; whence we conclude God, to be severe and cruel, at least not that good and gracious Being, whose mercies are over all his works, as the holy scriptures have represented him to us: we more readily consent to those passages, which describe and lament the misery of human nature; and we cry out in the words of the text, “Wherefore
“is light given to him that is in misery,
“and life to the bitter in soul?”

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It is scarce necessary to aid your reflections on this subject; or to enlarge on the calamities incident to human nature: but it is necessary for the sake of truth, and of the use to be made of it in the sequel of this discourse, that I should make a few observations in order to answer the question in the text; “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?”

It may be laid down as an universal truth, that there is no state of perfect happiness upon earth. If it were to be found, it should be among the rich and great, or amongst the virtuous and religious part of mankind: but ask the rich and great, if they are happy? They will confess, at least by their conduct, that they are far removed from that easy, that satisfied and pleasurable condition, which is ascribed to them by the common world: their plenty affords them less pleasure, and yields a less agreeable relish from their not having experienced preceding poverty and distress: misfortune or disappointment wounds the deeper
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in proportion to the pride and delicacy of the sufferers: nor are they without their load of cares, of envy and obloquy, to counterbalance their specious grandeur, their apparent happiness, and overflowing abundance. They have no command of the seasons or elements; nor will a cholic abate its pains, or a fever remit its rage, any more than the sea will be still, and cease to flow at their bidding. Nor does death pay any respect or reverence to the haughtiness of the terrible, or the despitefulness of the proud. Death visits without distinction the cottages of the poor, and the palaces of princes: his approach is only more terrible to the great, the rich and noble; as passions enflamed, and an indulgence in immoral practices, with much goods laid up for many years, have but little prepared, or disposed them to take their passage for the eternal world.

BUT the virtuous and religious, you will say, are certainly exempt from the misery
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herē ascribed to the men of this world. They have, it must be acknowledged, a title to blessedness from the promises of God, from the general conduct and protection of his Providence, and from the constitution of nature, by which a connection between virtue and happiness is established and generally maintained; yet after all, we cannot affirm that the righteous are in all cases, and at all times prosperous and happy in, and from this world. They have bodies like other men subject to pain, and liable to disease; as parents they cannot but feel themselves affected by the misfortunes and misconduct of their children: and as citizens they must necessarily share in the distresses or calamities that may befall their country or friends. Nay, good men, as such, have sometimes sufferings peculiar to themselves; from the hatred, the opposition, the calumny and persecution of the bad; nor are they without their concern and grief for the sins and sorrows of a wicked and degenerate world. And if

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the righteous, to whom God, and nature, and Providence have promised so largely, can scarce be deemed happy; how shall we allow the pretensions of the rest of mankind to this title?

AND here we may appeal to every age and sex, to every station and condition of life, if they find themselves in all respects, in what regards their health, their family, their fortune, and interests, their character, situation, and connections in the world, perfectly secure and at ease, and nothing to fear, to regret or lament. That mortal, I presume, is yet unknown, who could rationally pronounce himself thus perfect, secure and happy in, and by his accommodations in this life; we can scarce open our eyes without meeting some object of misery: conversation is frequently a detail of the misconduct, as history is only a narrative of the misfortunes of mankind.

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IN short, the picture; or rather the sketch of human life may perhaps not improperly, or untruly be thrown off in the following colours. It is a scene, where good is mixed with evil, and truth perplexed with error; as light and darkness distinguish the current of our natural time. Prosperity surfeits; adverse fortune shocks and perplexes us: if plenty palls, penury distresses us; without respect or honour we are discontented; in place and station we meet with envy and opposition. Business distracts; ambition intoxicates; ease renders us listless, torpid, and delicate; disappointment sits heavy upon us, and our schemes, when successful, answer not to the height and ardor of our expectation. Through life we are the bubbles of our hopes and passions; and rarely arrive at that imaginary point of rest and happiness, which we proposed as the object and end of all our labours and pursuits. If through the diseases and discipline of childhood, through the heat and passion of youth, and the cares of manhood,

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we should reach without any signal calamity, the summit of a wise man's wish, a serene old age; our sun then declines so fast, and the shades of night advance to meet us with so rapid a pace, that we must now think, if we think at all to purpose, not so much how to enjoy life, as to prepare for death; and the wisest man he will be found, who by the experience of the trouble he has met with in the voyage of life, is contented at least, if not desirous to take refuge in the port; as I presume, no wise man would upon a review of the past, make it his choice, if he had it in his option, to tread the round of life over again, to be exposed to the trials, temptations and injuries, and involved in the dangers, difficulties and distresses, under which he had formerly laboured. Life at best, and in what is called its best estate, crowned with health, with fortune, and honours, is perhaps the most dangerous situation, and most fatal to our virtue and religion, in the cultivation and obser-

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vance of which our truest and sincerest happiness consists.

By the observations here made, I would not be thought to aggravate the misery of human life, or disparage the Providence of God. "God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works;" as the misery of man, where and when he is miserable, is owing to himself, and to his not making a proper use, application and improvement of the dispensations of heaven. If man is unhappy, God and his laws are guiltless; they would remove, or remedy the misery of nature, all which arises from our departure from God, or is permitted only to draw us nearer to him.

II.

How, say you, is this misery of human nature consistent with, or reconcileable to the belief of a gracious Providence? I shall endeavour to answer this question, in

the sequel of the present discourse. I can scarcely be said to beg the question, when I lay it down as a principle, that the happiness of rational beings must be founded in virtue, in the system of a righteous and holy God.

THE means and dispensations, whether of nature or grace, that tend to promote the virtue, and thereby to advance the happiness of the human race, declare his beneficence and goodness, no less than his righteousness, holiness and truth. Would you have men happy without virtue? You destroy the righteousness and holiness of God. Would you detract from the means, the occasions and exercise of virtue? You so far detract from the goodness of God; as in diminishing the occasions of virtue, you abridge the means of happiness. Our truest, our sincerest, and most rational happiness arises from the exercise of the purest and sublimest virtues; but without misery or distress there would be no room for the display or exercise of such virtues; for instance;
without

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without pain, poverty, or distress of any kind, where would be room for patience or contentment? For submission to God's will, and an entire resignation to his Providence? By some signal misfortune, as it is called, the man is often reduced from pride, vanity, insolence, excess and extravagance, to temperance and œconomy, to moderation and sobriety of mind, to humility and a proper knowledge of himself, and of the God that rules over him. By sickness, by some chronical disorder or acute pain, we are often led, nay, we are often compelled to call upon that Almighty Helper, whom we had not before in all our thoughts. Crossed in our views, and disappointed in our projects on earth, we take refuge in heaven, where we shall be free from the accidents of chance and time, and where our God will appear in perfect beauty. In the misery and distress, under which you see mankind at present labour, and of which you complain, what riot and excess, what rudeness and insolence, what licence, what

profligacy, what immorality and impiety do you observe among the lower part of mankind? Let them be indulged, as you seem to require, in full health and ample fortunes, could you expect to see them more modest and moderate, more temperate and regular, more moral in their conduct towards men, or more fervent in their devotion to God, by the change? Say that all abounded, were increased in goods, and had need of nothing, where would be the room for the most amiable of the virtues, your charity and beneficence? Say that all were happy on earth, and who would entertain a wish, or lift up an eye to heaven? Nay in respect to this world, I will venture to affirm, that they, whose misery and distress you lament, where distress and misery have their proper and intended effect, are by far the happiest of their kind, and enjoy such a peace and serenity of mind, such a composure of affections, elevated hopes and heavenly prospects, as no outward circumstances or accommodations of life,

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life, no blaze of titles and honours, no excess of fortune, no height or splendor of greatness, can bestow, or will pretend to. Those deemed accursed by you, the wanton objector, and by the world, are the blessed of God; great without titles, and happy without pleasures, they require not such an evidence of his goodness, as would destroy his moral attributes, his righteousness, truth and holiness, and the further display of his mercy.

IN short, the misery of the world, is in some sort, the salvation of the world; depressed by poverty, humbled by misfortunes, and mortified by crosses, or stung by pain and persecution, we lift up our hearts more ardently, and cleave more stedfastly unto God: we are hereby better disposed, and in a manner necessitated to betake ourselves to the practice of piety and devotion, to a diligent cultivation of the means of grace, and a more steady and ardent faith in the promises of Glory. Good men themselves,
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(and need the bad then complain?) have sometimes occasion for these severer castigations of heaven. Ease and indolence, indulgence and carnal security are apt to steal in upon, and mix with the peaceable and more prosperous fruits of righteousness; and what is the damage? or rather, how infinite is the gain, if, for the pleasures, the honours, and fortune, that the world affords us, we obtain a sense of God's mercy, a taste of his love, and of the powers of the world to come, a powerful, a living and happy sense of the divine presence and perfections, with the comfort of his spirit, and a clearer prospect and assurance of future glory.

THUS the miserable world you complain of, considered as a stage for the exercise and improvement of our virtues, and for the advancement of our most important and lasting happiness, appears no longer a defect in the works of God, or an objection to his Providence. A scheme of things,
answer-

answerable to the demands of the Epicurean; wanting nothing, and abounding in all things that could gratify sense and passion, anticipate our wants, and prevent our very wishes, superseding the use of every faculty, and the exercise of every virtue, would indeed be a formidable objection: it would destroy not only the virtues of the man, but the most eminent graces of the christian; charity and brotherly affection, all piety and prayer, all humility, and resignation, all faith in the invisible God, and all hope of immortal life; for who that was happy on earth would set his affections on things in heaven? Or, what reasonable expectations could we form of the necessity of a future state, were all things right and regular, and fitted to our ease and contentment in the present? Away then with all such objections against Providence, as under the pretence of reason and philosophy, would destroy our truest comforts at present, and the glorious hopes of blessedness for ever.

2. THIS

2. THIS is a proper and sufficient answer to the complaints urged against a Divine Providence, from the evil or misery that would seem to be the common or general lot of human nature in the present state. But as God is infinite in wisdom, and wonderful in his working, the same appearances will be found, upon enquiry, to serve several ends, and being seen in various lights, still beautiful, harmonious and beneficent, bring still more glory to the Creator in his works.

THERE is, as will be more fully hereafter shewn, a gradual progression through the whole system of nature, as far as we can trace it, from little to great, from less to more, and from mean and insignificant to higher and nobler perfection; each of these links, that compose this mighty chain of nature, is perfect in its kind; yet serves at the same time to connect and illustrate the link that borders next upon it; and thus more amply displays the perfections of the
Creator,

DISCOURSE VII. 189

Creator, both in its own frame and state, and in the relation it has, and the connection it holds with the orders above and below it. Man appears to be the principal link of the chain in the visible creation, and the highest order of the animal race, and a degree above it, distinguished, as he is by superior blessings, by rational faculties, and by his taste for truth, virtue, and happiness. But these blessings, though eminent in themselves and in man the subject of them, appear still more valuable and respectable, by comparing and contrasting them with the lower capacities, the ruder enjoyments, the meaner engagements, and forbidden passions of the mere animal race; and that man must be insensible, as well as ungrateful, who sees not, and feels not his privileges heightened, and endeared to him, by viewing them in a comparative light, with the sensations, and situation of the beasts that perish.

THE order of creation that we actually

ally see, is progressive; and being the work of an Almighty Infinite Agent, rises, we may presume, both in extent and dignity, beyond our present capacity to comprehend; we see its advancement from atoms to worlds and systems of worlds; we see the gradual progression from insect to man; and shall we here stay the Almighty Hand, and say, "hitherto shalt thou go and no further:" or, should we not rather infer by the analogy of nature, and from the infinite of the divine perfections, that man himself is but a lower link of that chain of beings, which like its Author, reacheth through immensity. Man is, no doubt, as the highest of the animal, so the lowest of the rational race: thousands, nay millions of spiritual orders may probably fill up the chasm, if it can be ever filled up, between the human and the Divine nature: a chasm infinitely greater than that between man, and the lowest of the reptile race; the lower capacities and enjoyments of these last, we have seen peculiarly fitted to let
man

man see, upon the comparifon, his own fuperior advantages and attainments; and thus the frailties and miferies, the rational and moral evils of the human race may ferve in their turn, as foils or fhades, to fet off and illuftrate the fuperior fplendor, dignity and perfeftions of higher orders of beings. Angels themfelves, and fpirits of light would be unhappy, or at leaft lefs happy, if they had nothing but fuperior perfeftion before them; nothing but the infinite glories of God to contemplate: his goodnefs, and their own fuperior happinefs they muft certainly be more fenfible of, by obferving the ignorance and infirmity, the low tafte, the fordid appetites, the fervile occupations, the fluggifh motion, the difordered and diftempered bodies and vicious habits of mortal men: they have a jufter knowledge and a more grateful relifh of their own refined and fpiritual nature; their agility in a purer fphere, their keener vifion and clearer apprehenfions, their angelic faculties, their fublime contemplations,

with

with the clearer manifestations vouchsafed them, of divine truth, and heavenly light and glory.

NOR let man be mortified, nor God accused or censured for this gradual progression in his creatures, this subordination and subserviency of one thing to another in the system of the universe : or, does man accuse his Maker, on account, or in favour of the reptile race, by which, or by comparing themselves with which, the lords of the creation are made sensible of their own dignity, privileges and prerogatives. Let us rather admire the wisdom and goodness of God, manifested in this œconomy : he has kindly denied to the inferior tribes of animals, the knowledge of the superior privileges and excellencies of the higher orders ; which would set their own insignificance in too strong a light, and make them sick of their existence : as was the mole acquainted with the faculties and superior advantages of the human race : or was man personally, as

I may

I may say, acquainted with the spiritual perfections and divine splendor of angels, or permitted from his hillock to take a survey of their crowns of light and robes of glory, and to hear their songs of praise and heavenly hallelujahs: in this case, the inferiour natures might seem to have reason to murmur and complain, as finding themselves distressed and confounded by so unequal a comparison, with those higher and more excellent orders of being. But now we have only a revealed, not a personal knowledge of the more favoured and exalted Sons of God; a knowledge fitted, not to dispirit or mortify, but to animate us, as being called to the same hopes and glory of God.

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DISCOURSE VIII.

JOB iii. 20.

*Wherefore is light given to him that is in
misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?*

WE may not, we cannot properly judge
of the attributes, the providence and
goodness of God from a partial survey of his
works, or from what we observe in one

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link

link of the universal chain of beings. If the mole, or the emmet from his hillock, could take a survey of the works, the situations, the capacities, the connections and business of man; do you think that their sphere of observation would qualify either of these earth-born philosophers to form a proper judgment of human nature, its interests, its policy and enjoyments? This earth may be but as the mole's, or the emmet's hillock in the bosom of the universe; and its inhabitant man, though he may seem elevated in his observatory, is not perhaps by nature better qualified to take from thence a truer judgment of the divine, than the reptile speculatist is to make a just estimate of the human nature: the distance between the man and the mole is nothing compared to the chasm, that intervenes between man and his Maker. The earth, and all its inhabitants, may be but as dust upon the balance, as atoms that play on the sun's beam, or as insects called into life by his warm and fostering rays. From a hair of the head,
though

though perfect in its kind, and proper in its situation, you would but form a very imperfect judgment of the structure of the human body, and of Him who formed it. This world may be no more than as a hair of the head, compared with the system of the universe. We cannot raise our conceptions high enough, nor sufficiently enlarge our ideas, when we would conceive, or express ourselves aright of the operations of an infinite and all-perfect Being. Myriads of worlds, and systems of worlds of higher order and inconceivable perfection, have probably place in the sphere of an infinite and almighty Agent; which, if we think of it and Him aright, must comprehend every kind and degree of good. Thus the evil which you complain of, as belonging to man and nature, is to be considered as only a less good; which, not communicated, had detracted from the infinite fulness of the Creator. An almighty and infinite Being must require an infinite sphere for his agency. Let any degree of good, and I

will add, let any degree of evil, that may contribute to good, be wanting in the universe, it would bespeak incapacity, impotence or malevolence in the Creator : universal, all-perfect Good, which the objectors to a Divine Providence seem to think necessary, can no more be communicated, and confined to one Being, or to one order of Beings, than almighty Power can be exhausted in one act, or infinite and eternal Wisdom displayed in one effort.

WHEN God manifests himself in his works, it must be in a way worthy of God, and expressive of all his attributes. Universal, uninterrupted good, freely bestowed, the fruits of no labour, the effects of no virtue, the reward of no patience, the answer to no prayer, and the consequence of no preceding or experienced evil might perhaps discredit the Giver, and corrupt the receiver : the angels thus probably lost their first happy state. And thus you observe still in the greatest fortunes, the least virtue,

tue, or pious gratitude. You find the contempt of God and goodness too often the most conspicuous in those, who should seem the most obliged, and who have the largest share of that natural good, which you seem to require as the portion of all; and perhaps after all, they enjoy the least sense or share, who, according to your conceptions, have the most abundant means of happiness. So that God cannot, as a wise, a moral and gracious Creator and Governor of the world, indiscriminately bestow that good which you require, indiscriminately upon all, A common, a natural, a necessary good, would cease to be considered as any good at all; at least such a good, as implied any moral attributes in the Giver, or any moral virtue in the receiver.

THAT there are other regions in the universe of a milder clime, with inhabitants less subject to the inclemency of seasons, the dreadful effects of passion, to the distempers and pains of nature, and the acci-

dents of time and chance, is allowed, is contended for. And this supposition should be sufficient to vindicate the Divine Providence from the objections raised by the partial and transient evils of this life. But it may be of further use to us; those happy inhabitants of kindlier climes and distant regions, must be virtuous, must be holy, in order to be happy. Trials undergone, and afflictions improved, have probably advanced them to, or blessings not abused have preserved them in their state of happiness: admitted to God's Kingdom, and adopted sons and heirs of his Glory, and ravished with the dawn of an eternal day now rising upon their souls, do you think they repent, or repine at the remembrance of the labours they have undergone, the dangers they have encountered, or the graces they exercised in their short passage through life? Or, do they accuse that Providence, which has through much tribulation gained them an admission into the kingdom of glory? Have they less relish for the joys of heaven, from the experience

ience they have had of sufferings and temptations undergone on earth? Have they less love for God; or less security in their own happiness, from the knowledge of his faithfulness and truth, in the promises made good, and the exceeding great reward now allotted to their faith and obedience? Those blessed spirits behold you, angels of God behold you, not as the objector to a kind and gracious Providence would represent you, as blind and miserable, and poor and naked, mere worms of dust, and reptiles of the earth, but as candidates and heirs, struggling in the birth, to immortal life and glory.

THIS world is a scene of misery, and a subject of complaint to those only, who look no further, and behold not God in the immensity of his works, in the power and perfection of his attributes, or the blessed fruits of his sacred dispensations; but the virtuous believer considers this earth as a colony of heaven, or rather as a nursery of
immortal

immortal souls, exposed to and tried for a moment by the rigour of the climate, whereby they gain health and vigour; and watered by the dews of heaven, grow up, flourish, and expand their beauties, and breathe their fragrance, till they are transplanted by their almighty cultor's hand to a happier clime, more open to his benigner influence, and to the radiant glories of his throne.

How does it illustrate, and enlarge to our view the divine perfections, particularly the abundant goodness and almighty mercy of God, to see him through a course of ages raising from dust and ashes, from sin and misery, sons of glory and immortality! To give mere life might be the necessary effect of his almighty energy, and infinite activity; but to implant, to cherish, to reward and immortalize virtue, bespeaks moral goodness, righteousness and holiness, and commands our veneration, esteem, obedience and affection: but to bear patiently
with

with a sinful world ; to invite sinners to repentance, to offer criminals a pardon, and to engage them by the means of grace and the hopes of glory ; to apply the tender corrections of a father to save those from perishing for ever, whom paternal indulgence will not move ; and by every means to promote and work out the salvation of the moral world, and to bring many sons to glory ; this speaks such an Almighty mercy, such an infinite of love and compassion, as commands, or should command not only our pious gratitude, but our fondest admiration, and our warmest devotion and love. Review then this sinful and miserable world, and consider it as a subject, on which God is perpetually operating, and manifesting, in all proper measure, the effects of his almighty power, infinite wisdom, and supreme goodness and mercy : protecting and governing all by his universal Providence ; crowning with his singular blessings, or supporting and refining by his friendly and fatherly visitations, the just and good ; reclaiming

claiming by his severer discipline the criminal and licentious ; pardoning the penitent, and sometimes for the example's sake, overwhelming with awful and signal vengeance the hardened and desperate offender ; again, consider this world as perhaps no more than an atom in the system of the universe, the least and lowest effect of the attributes of the Creator, and holding out to other worlds, and their inhabitants, a constant lesson of holy joy and pious gratitude, for the superior blessings indulged them by their Maker ; yet withal regard this world as the seat of an intellectual order of beings, born to reason and reflection, to a sense of virtue, religion and happiness, with a capacity for future and immortal bliss : consider life as the harbinger of immortality, and time as no more than a preparation for eternity ; consider the nature of God, and that it is more possible for you to mistake in your judgment, than for Him to blunder, or be defective in the plan, or in the execution of his works ; and it is probably nothing but
their

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their variety and number, their greatness and majesty, the excess of power, of wisdom, of glory, of splendor, and I will add of goodness upon the whole, inherent in them, that puzzles or escapes your sight, rather than that they are wanting in perfection in the parts, and in the whole.

If you complain of, and object this your ignorance as an evil, look down upon the animal world and insect race below you, and look up to your future hopes and higher expectations; and you will bless God for your situation and prospects. If reason or religion assured you, that this world was the only theatre of God's agency and attributes, beyond and besides which there existed no other rest or residence for the children of God; there might be some room for your objections and complaints: but when the probability, not to say the assurance and demonstration lies on the other side of the question; and that unnumbered worlds and systems of worlds revolving in
purser

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purèr æther, shining brighter with the glory of God, and for ever resounding with the songs and hallelujahs of happy spirits, may probably exist in the bosom of infinite space, the proper efflux of an infinite God; and that you yourselves are every moment advancing to join the blissful choirs, your murmurs will end in silent admiration, or break out into rapturous exclamation: "Great
"and marvellous are thy works, Lord God
"Almighty! Just and true are thy ways,
"thou King of saints!"

THE goodness of God shines out unclouded in those regions and upon those happy sons of light: but the mercy of God, perhaps an essential attribute of Deity, could only have place in a world of sinful creatures; and had man, had frail and sinful man been wanting, the diadem of God-head had shone with less lustre, deprived of this gem of mercy. Superior and dignified spirits would have been less happy, in wanting a subject of their praise and gratitude; and the
power,

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power, the glory and triumph of God's Truth would have been less conspicuous.

WE have seen that divine passion, the love of God, in numerous instances, superior to persecution, to peril, and the sword; to hunger and nakedness; to pain, sickness, and death itself; rendering its subjects invulnerable, and more than conquerors. Behold the feeble mortal, bowed down with years and infirmities, or languishing under some acute, painful disorder; tortured with pain, or agonizing in death; and yet still holding fast his integrity, trusting in his God; resigned to his will, and singing praises to his name! Here is indeed a sight worthy of God, and which does more honour to his name and sacred truth, than worlds of such worthless people of pleasure, whom you require for the vindication of Divine Providence.

To drink wine in bowls, to eat the herbs of the stall, to be crowned with the rose-buds,

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buds, and chaunt to the sound of the viol, speaks no virtue, argues no dignity, forms no character that can challenge the esteem of a wise man, or the approbation of a good man: but passions subdued or restrained, temptations resisted, pleasures renounced, pain and poverty submitted to for God, and virtue's sake, raise the man above mortality, give him a name and title among the Sons of God; and are expressive not only of greatness of mind, but attended, I will venture to say with more peace of soul, and taste of sincere happiness, than was ever the lot of the most fortunate voluptuary upon earth. A powerful, a living and happy sense of God's presence and perfections, an experience of his mercies, and a taste of his love, a beam of heavenly light, and the prospect of future glory are, what the worst fortune of miserable mortals does not debar them of, but often begets, promotes and cherishes: and to souls thus devoutly disposed and heavenly tempered, all the ways and works of God appear gracious and lovely,

all

DISCOURSE VIII. 209

all seasons are happy, and all events acceptable. The presence and love of God is to them health and beauty, fortune and honour, peace and happiness, grace and glory. These are the precious fruits to be reaped in this miserable and sinful world. "God is," wherever he is properly received, "the father and fountain of mercy, and the "God of all comfort;" if he sends or permits evil, it is that the abundance of his mercy, and the Almighty power of his grace may triumph more gloriously in the conquest, in the removal and in the punishment of it.

THUS this barren earth, this howling wilderness, as you would seem to think it, does honour to God's husbandry, who produces from it "fruits unto holiness, and the end everlasting life." Complain then no more, O man of your present situation, as miserable and sinful: it is your infant state, your first stage pushing forwards and rising every moment to a sublimer sphere, to

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your advancement in holiness and happiness,
and to your final exaltation among the ever
blessed sons of God.

DIS-

DISCOURSE IX.

JEREMIAH xii. 1.

*Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead
with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy
judgments: wherefore doth the way of the
wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they
happy who deal very treacherously?*

THE complaint here preferred by Je-
remiah against God and his righte-
ous Providence is old, almost as the world
itself; and has continued down to our days

an occasion of offence, doubt and perplexity to the virtuous, and of objection, infidelity and triumph to the vicious; from whence it may seem to have some foundation in the nature, or at least in the appearance of things.

A COMPLAINT of so long a standing, and so general, is surely of moment; and it is still more so, if we consider its tendency: for if it is allowed all the strength and all the weight objectors lay upon it, it will shake the foundations, nay, it will be subversive of all religion, both natural and revealed, and lead men by a natural and easy progression from their belief of no present providence, to infer no future state: for allow that God regards not at all, or regards with an eye of favour and distinction the wicked in this world, and you cannot consistently conclude, that he will make them the objects of his vengeance, or justice in another.

BUT though the objection may seem,
and

and indeed is directly levelled against natural religion, yet it will be found to bear not less hard upon revealed: in this, God has declared himself “a holy God, who hath “no pleasure in wickedness, but hateth all “workers of iniquity:” now should the will of God manifested in the course of nature, declare the contrary to this; should it be found universally true, that the wicked are peculiarly prosperous in respect both of family and fortune; that “their houses “are safe from fear, neither is the rod of “God upon them; that they are not in “troubles as other men, neither are they “plagued like other men:” and was the blessing which God hath promised to the righteous, “riches and honour shall be in “his house: his seed shall be mighty upon “earth: with long life will I satisfy him, “and shew him my salvation:” were these, I say, and such like blessings promised to the righteous, made good universally or generally, and in a distinguished manner to the wicked: in this case we

could not believe the word of God himself against the clear testimony of his works, but must believe that revelation to be false, against which, nature and fact, and the whole history of mankind gave irrefragable evidence.

FOR the sake then of the truth which has been so long disputed, for the sake of the virtuous, nay for the sake of the vicious; in defence of natural and of revealed religion, let us examine the force of this objection, and see whether it can bear all the weight that has been laid upon it, and whether it may not be answered to the satisfaction at least of the believer, if not of his adversary.

THE objection is generally aggravated, as you see it is in the prophet's expostulation with his God in the text: "Wherefore, says he, are all they happy who deal very treacherously?" And both holy Job and the Psalmist in their complaints on this subject
seem

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seem to suppose the wicked in general not liable to common casualties or calamities, but distinguished by a larger measure of happiness than was the lot of other men. But here as it generally happens, when passion is the accuser, sufficient regard has not been had to reason and the truth of fact. Observe the general misery; examine it, trace it to its fountain, and you will easily derive it from the general wickedness of mankind. To what may we so generally ascribe bankruptcy, or distress in fortune as to prodigality, idleness or imprudence? What is it that stamps infamy upon the character, but want of probity in the conduct? Do gluttony, lewdness and intemperance promote or insure a larger measure of health or length of days? And do not the false and the faithless, and they who are guilty of wrong and robbery to mankind, afford the most frequent examples of legal pains and penalties or of legal executions? Is lawless ambition always successful in its attempts, or happy in its success?

P 4

Or,

Or, does not history afford us numerous instances of the same tragical fate attending it, that attended Cataline and Absalom? Vice is so pernicious to the public, as well as to the practiser, that societies have in all ages fenced themselves with laws and punishments, as barriers against the overflowings of ungodliness, which might otherwise swallow them up: and where laws are wanting, or not sufficient to reach the case of enormous offenders, nature and indignation prompt men for their own security to take up arms to repel and oppose the unjust invader or cruel usurper. The tyrants of the earth, who have raised themselves above law, and proceeded with equal contempt of the peace, property and liberties of mankind, have frequently fallen a sacrifice to the rage of those whom they have oppressed, and thereby given the most remarkable examples of unprosperous wickedness. In other instances, where a criminal by his prudence avoids the consequences laid in nature, or by his power or cunning evades or baffles

baffles the penalties annexed by law to his transgressions, you frequently see him overtaken by some unforeseen accident, and arrested by the hand of Providence in such a manner as leads every serious observer to acknowledge the truth of that conclusion; “verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.”

Thus holy Job when considering, and almost staggered with this subject (for possibly his own afflictions made him view the prosperity of unrighteous men in too full and favourable a light) yet is obliged to acknowledge; “how oft is the candle of
“the wicked put out? and how oft com-
“eth their destruction upon them? God
“distributeth sorrows in his anger. They
“are as stubble before the wind, and as
“chaff that the storm carrieth away: God
“layeth up his iniquity for his children;
“he rewardeth him and he shall know it:
“his eyes shall see his destruction, and he
“shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty:
“what

“ what pleasure hath he in his house after
“ him, when the number of his months
“ is cut off in the midst?” And thus we
find the Psalmist engaged in the same speculation and making the same confession.
“ I myself have seen the ungodly in great
“ power, and flourishing like a green bay-
“ tree: I went by and lo he was gone:
“ I sought him, but his place could no
“ where be found.”

FROM individuals should we proceed to take a view of general bodies, which are made up of individuals, the history of the world from its foundation, will bear witness to the miserable effects of vice and impiety, and preserves upon record the devastation and ruin they have brought upon cities and kingdoms. Thus you see the natural and general tendency of wickedness is to introduce and spread misery, and not to promote the happiness of mankind; and the holiness and righteousness of God are clearly vindicated.

But

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BUT exceptions, it must be acknowledged, are to be found to this general process of a righteous Providence in the moral world. We sometimes observe the vicious not attended or pursued with the usual effects of vice, but flourishing in health, at ease or abounding in fortune, covered with titles and invested with offices and honours. "They are in no peril of death," says the Psalmist speaking of the wicked, "but are
 "lusty and strong. They come in no mis-
 "fortune like other men, neither are they
 "plagued like other men: their eyes swell
 "with fatness, and they do even what they
 "lust. Lo, these are the ungodly, these
 "prosper in the world; these have riches
 "in possession." To the same purpose holy Job had long before observed, "that
 "the wicked live, become old, yea, are
 "mighty in power: their seed is established
 "in their sight with them, and their off-
 "spring before their eyes. Their houses
 "are safe from fear, neither is the rod of
 "God upon them. Their bull gendereth,
 "and

“and faileth not; their cow calveth, and
“casteth not her calf.” They send forth
“their little ones like a flock, and their
“children dance; they take the timbrel
“and harp, and rejoyce at the found of the
“organ. They spend their days in wealth,
“and in a moment go down to the
“grave.”

LET us now examine this objected happiness of the wicked, and see what it amounts to. They are, it is allowed, sometimes wealthy; but wealth accumulated beyond what prudence dictates, and the uses of life require, is rather a burden than a blessing to the possessor: so much gold laid up under locks and bars, never to be called forth to private or public service, is of equal value with so much dross; there is no difference; only the former exacts more labour in acquiring, and more anxiety and care in preserving. Treasure laid up in bags and coffers, not used, but useless, might as well have remained in the mines,

or

DISCOURSE IX. 221

or in the bowels of the earth, and is as much any other man's as the owner's.

BUT let us suppose this wealth in the hands of a sinner of a different complexion, a spender and not a saver; we see him apply it to all the uses, or rather the abuses, which appetite and passion suggest, to the fashionable follies and luxuries of life, to gaming, riot and debauch: do you call this man happy? You may as properly call the man in a fever healthy: a banquet where blind and brutal passion is alone admitted, where the man is excluded, where the bounds of reason and the proportions of nature are exceeded, is mere rage and tumult, where the very appetite for pleasure is distracted by variety, and surfeited by excess, and the lamp and vigour of life is abated and damped and sometimes totally extinguished by an over-abundant supply.

IF you object the prosperous condition
of

of those wicked men, who are not guilty of these excesses, but are more discreet in their crimes and prudent in their pleasures, you hereby in some degree obviate your own objection of the prosperity of wicked men, as such, as you are here obliged to detract from their vices, in order to add to their enjoyments.

BUT suppose the voluptuary a man of more taste and sense, and to conduct his views more cautiously, extracting from the hive of pleasure the honey without the sting; perhaps upon examination no man will be found less a man of pleasure than he who professes it: the refined and delicate are at more labour and expence in providing exquisites and extraordinaries, than they who are content to satisfy their common wants with the common blessings of nature: they are most ready to take offence, and are soonest shocked and disgusted with the grossness and absurdities of all around them: the smallest trifles are
to

to them an occasion of disquiet; their delicacy by degrees degenerates into disdain; and what would be to others luxury, serves only to disgust their palate, or disturb their repose; and thus this envied, this objected man of pleasure is often more wretched and pitiable than the slave who attends him.

BUT it is further objected, that vice is often invested with titles and honours, seated in high place and pre-eminence, and commands the observance, the respect and esteem of mankind.

Now what happiness let me ask, is conveyed by titles without honour, or honours not founded in real virtue? By titles, the purchase of vice or vanity; and by honours, the hire or the reward of venality and corruption? In respect of dignity, they are not an ornament, but a reproach to the wearers; and serve only to render their infamy more conspicuous: the respect paid to such titles and honours, is no more than
the

the stupid stare of undiscerning fools, or the abject sycophancy of designing knaves: the wild African has his court, his prince, his titles and honours, the badges of which, if I remember aright, are a string, a feather and a shell: now of just so much moment in respect of happiness are the most pompous and sounding titles and gilded honours, which European policy and politeness has invented, and too often annexed to vice and ignorance; and when laid in an even balance, they weigh not one grain more than the African's string, his feather, and his shell.

I MAY add, that if vanity is tickled by a feather, it is disgusted by a feather, and that it is a paradox to say, that the proud are happy; whose lives are often ended, before their desire is accomplished: but suppose them mounted to the height of their ambition, their jealousy of rivals and competitors allows them no peace, and their fear of a fall no security.

As

As for high offices and employments in the hands of the wicked, or indeed in any hands, they are far from being the object of envy, or the want of them the proper subject of complaint in others, being subject to the same fears and suspicions as ambition, and sometimes attended with the same cares, and more distraction and fatigue than belong to avarice itself.

LET the wicked be in possession of high offices and employments; so far as they discharge the duty, they are honestly entitled to the wages annexed to their office; if they neglect this, their exaltation is attended with the same contempt as any other popular dignity; and the emoluments of their place are to be considered as only so many sources to satisfy the thirst of avarice, or to feed the cravings of luxury: and what real happiness is to be found in luxury and avarice, we have already observed. In truth, high offices and employments, attended as they generally are, with

variety of distractions, and little peace or content to the possessors, no good man ever envied, and for the sake of his own happiness, I believe no good man ever desired.

BUT let us suppose further, to give all possible strength to this objection, wickedness more prosperous than it has been, or perhaps ever will be found; let us suppose the statesman easy, the debauched healthy, and the proud happy; let the luxurious be without their loathing, the covetous without their cares, and the ambitious without their fears: yet what after all, is the whole amount of this envied happiness? What more than a feast for sense, for vanity, for vice and folly? a feast, where wisdom, truth, virtue, religion, and reason have no place; the wicked as such, set them in what stations of pleasure and profit, of distinction and eminence you please, must still be far removed from what alone can constitute the proper happiness of a reasonable Being,

ing, domestic peace, or peace of mind and tranquillity of heart. These have their foundation, and they have no other, in the approbation of good men, and the testimony of a good conscience, in the present sense of the favour of a reconciled God, and the consequent hopes of a blessed immortality. Thus the wicked in their best estate are more wretched than the truly virtuous in their worst; mere animals of the earth and only of better complexions than their fellow-brutes, like them enslaved to sense and nature, but with more vanity, more folly, more conscious guilt and shame; they avow themselves publickly devoid of all sense, of spirit and truth, of grace and glory: their very prosperity, which heightens the malignity of moral disorders, is a curse and not a blessing. Of this opinion seem to have been some of the wisest men of all ages, who instead of splendor and pomp, opulence and pleasure, have first or last chosen poor or moderate circumstances, ab-

stinence, modest retreat and concealment from the world.

II.

BUT granting that the wicked as such, are not happy; they are, you say, sometimes prosperous. We allow it is so; and we assert it must be so, for reasons that will still justify Providence to the common sense of mankind.

1. MAN, in order to denominate him a moral agent, or a creature in any degree virtuous or vicious, must be endued with moral liberty, or a power of determining his actions agreeably or disagreeably to the rule of right: capable he must be of obedience and disobedience to the will of his Maker; or he could not reasonably be accountable to the Judge of heaven and earth; a restraint upon his conduct, that amounted to the force of natural necessity, must
render

render him alike free from praise and blame,
from guilt or innocence.

Now suppose wicked men in no degree or instance to prosper; but instantly and evidently to be sufferers in proportion as they are sinners; let them be cut off or stigmatized with some signal chastisement from heaven in every first act of disobedience; in this case wickedness would soon cease from off the face of the earth, and there would not be one ungodly man left; the unfaithful would perish from among the children of men; crimes would be avoided not as crimes, but as punishments: who would dare to steal, were the gallows to be all the fruit of his gains? Who would venture on a debauch attended with certain disease, or take down a draught of pleasure, who was sure to find poison at the bottom of the cup? Was revenge to be only its own certain murderer, and a haughty spirit to produce its own immediate fall and debasement, who would be so hardy as to indulge to

pride or passion? In such a scheme of things, if there was little vice, there would certainly be little or no virtue in the world; as there could be no morality, no manhood or self-denial in abstaining from what was evidently so big with distress, disappointment, or ruin. Knave's themselves would in such a scheme of things, be honest upon the principles of knavery; that is, to gain by it, and none but mad-men would be otherwise. Take away all the profit, pleasure and honours, that are sometimes seen to attend vice, and you take away all temptation to it; but where I pray, would be the virtue of resistance, when there was no temptation to transgress?

2. BUT further, suppose wickedness to be always punished in the first act, and like a plant nipped in the bud, never allowed to grow to any bulk or stateliness; we should still be at a loss to account for the ways, and to vindicate the justice of Providence, when we sat down to judge of the punish-

punishment and its proportion to the crime. A wicked attempt or intention, though not carried into execution, must be as criminal in the eye of an all-seeing and all-holy God, as a wicked act; since the heart, which he chiefly regards, and the will, which constitutes the morality of the action, are alike consenting in both. Here then would be a visible punishment without an apparent crime, and you would be as ready to exclaim against Providence for punishing the innocent, as you were before for not punishing the guilty.

AGAIN, crimes have a less or greater malignity, and are more or less criminal, according to the circumstances of him who commits them. Bad education, bad example, and a greater innate depravity in the constitution, falling in with a strong temptation, must render a vicious act far less blameable and atrocious in one man, than in another, who with the advantages of good education, good example, a frame of

body and spirit more friendly and favourable to virtue, and under less tempting circumstances, is guilty of the same act. Now God, who alone judgeth righteous judgment, assigning a different punishment to crimes in your eyes apparently the same, would leave you still room to object to the equity of his Providence.

BUT further, suppose your scheme of misery invariably annexed to wickedness to be so equally administered, and the proportion to the crime to be so exactly and visibly adjusted, as to leave no room to any exceptions; your plan would be still imperfect, unless you saw (and you have an equal right to demand) a full reward inseparably annexed to virtue; and that health, riches and honours should make their constant abode in the dwellings of the righteous; but here should Providence grant your requests, you would gain too much and be a loser by your blessings: such an equal administration of punishment and reward at present, would take away the
neces-

necessity and reasonableness of a future state of retribution ; as there could remain no vice to be punished, and no virtue to be rewarded.

3. BUT consider further, that in this your zeal for justice upon transgressors, you would destroy the mercy of God. Wickedness in no instance or degree prosperous or successful, must require that the wicked should be punished or cut off in every first act of transgression ; but by this you would leave them no room for repentance, and hereby discharge from our christian duty perhaps the most acceptable service we can pay to our Creator. Who is there among men, who can say, I have not sinned, I am clean from my transgression ? And had the rigour of the law been executed upon your first transgression, your objection had indeed been answered, but to your confusion or destruction ; or, had you still survived an instance of God's vengeance, rather than a monument of his mercy, you would still have had

had more reasonable cause of complaint and objection.

BUT suppose yourself as innocent as your own self-love and vanity would flatter you; let not the wicked, who are the objects of God's mercy, be quite debarred of yours: several circumstances in their life and fortune, may have contributed to those vices, from which yourself perhaps in the same circumstances had not been exempted. "Loaded with plenty, by an unhappy propensity in nature, we sink into sloth, and dissolve in luxury. Surrounded with flatterers, it is not easy to resist the impulses of vanity; born to honours, nursed in the sunshine of a court, and warmed with the influence of royal favour, it must require no small degree of self-denial to resist or quench the spirit of ambition, and a thirst for glory. They who know no wants and fear no changes, are under the strongest temptations to forget God; And when we observe such numbers, whom even poverty and distress

treasures cannot preserve from debauchery and intemperance, we should be still less shocked at the degeneracy of the rich and prosperous. God therefore who knows all hearts, and weighs all circumstances, may look down with pity on those whom you behold as the objects of envy, and judge them more entitled to compassion, who are exposed to more and greater temptations than other men.

Would you strike off repentance from the system of christian duties, to what a miserable condition would you hereby reduce mankind? For who then could be saved? Who is there among us, who is not, or has not been, in some degree or other an offender? And surely the fruits of repentance, though they spring not from the noblest root, yet may rise to that strength and beauty, as to be an offering acceptable and well-pleasing in the sight of heaven. Virtue, I mean human virtue, which affects to build itself on the mere principles
of

of nature and reason, is often attended with a vanity, which disgraces it, and destroys its own pretensions ; there was a pride, a stubbornness, a self-sufficiency, and a kind of omnipotence very unbecoming the finfulness and frailty of human nature, which yet was claimed by the stoics, and does little honour to their reason or their virtue ; and we find the pretenders to perfection in modern schools, not greatly distinguished either for their modesty, their charity or humility ; but a fall makes us sensible of our own weakness and inability to support ourselves, and of the mercy and power of God, which vouchsafes to recover, to establish and strengthen us. Reflection upon past misconduct renders us both modest and more cautious for the time to come : the experience of our own frailty makes us more charitable and compassionate to the infirmities of others ; the bare imputation of a fault makes a good man order his steps with more prudence, and abstain even from the distant appearance of evil ; but the consci-

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ousness of real guilt works in the penitent more carefulness, more clearing of himself, more indignation against sin, more fear of offending, more vehement desire of God's favour, more zeal for his honour and truth, and more revenge upon his affections and lusts; his prayers for pardon and peace are more fervent, his devotions are enlarged, his gratitude enflamed, and he loves much because he has much forgiven.

HE therefore, who for the honour of the Divine Justice, would have finners cut off in the midst of their sins, would leave no room for these precious fruits of repentance: and he would in particular destroy that necessary branch of it, restitution; which surely a man cut off in the midst of his fraud or violence could never make.

BUT let sinners be permitted to enjoy or survive the fruits of their sins; let God for a time endure these vessels of wrath, and you will see a clearer and fuller manifestation

tion of both his mercy and justice. “Cut
“it down,” says our impatience of the
barren fig-tree, “why cumbereth it the
“ground?” Not so, says the Divine Husbandman; “let it alone this year also, till
“I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if
“it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after
“that, thou shalt cut it down.” After
mercy has been long offered and long rejected by the sinner, the Divine Justice and
Judgment appear more signal in his punishment, or destruction: he is exalted for a
little time, whereby his fall is rendered more
signal. Had the Jews been less highly favoured of the Lord Jehovah: had he not
with much long-suffering bore with their
idolatries and rebellion; their contempt of
his messages, and the slaughter of his prophets; the rest of mankind had wanted the
most remarkable proof of the Divine Compassion and Forbearance; and we had at
this day been deprived of the most striking
example of the Divine Justice and Severity,
which

which we now read in the sad reverse of the fortunes of this people.

WE often observe the same measure or method of proceeding by Divine Providence in the lives and fortunes of private persons, as of national bodies. You see the vain man mortified, the proud humbled, the oppressor crushed and spoiled: you frequently see the malicious persecuted, and the revengeful overtaken by divine vengeance; the man of jollity and extravagance reduced to want or beggary; the man of pleasure a frightful instance of sorrow and pain; and him, who insulted his aged father, suffering the same from his own rebellious children.

THUS the prosperity of the wicked for a time is so far from being an objection against, that it is a strong proof of a Divine Providence. Let David, by the murder of Uriah, succeed to the possession of his wife, the success must appear a miserable purchase, when

when he afterwards saw lust and blood spreading infamy and desolation in his own family. Thus Ahab took possession of Naboth's vineyard, by the cruel policy of Jezebel his wife being permitted to take effect in the death of the honest owner; but this rapine and cruelty was soon repaid upon their own heads, when they were afterwards both violently deprived of their lives and kingdom.

OTHER reasons may be assigned for, and other ends served by, the permission of men for a time to succeed in a course of prosperous wickedness; a cruel tyrant, or a hungry invader is often a scourge in the Hand of Heaven to correct a licentious and degenerate people; a needy robber, though certainly a criminal, yet may be sometimes less so than the person he despoils; and his crime in respect of the sufferer, be no more than an act of justice or resumption, of what avarice or fraud had purloined from the rights and properties of others.

others. The luxury of the rich, though certainly a vice, yet answers the same ends to the publick, as other men's charity. Their dress, their equipage, their buildings, and other plans of art for curiosity, vanity or pleasure, afford employment and support to thousands; and even the grosser luxuries of the wicked cannot be indulged without this accidental use of contributing more plentifully to the real wants of their inferiors and dependents. And thus the lewd and profligate heir, whom you adduce as an objection to, is frequently a proof of the government of a righteous Providence; being ordained or permitted by the just judgment of God to refund and disperse by his extravagance, what has been amassed by the oppression and avarice of his progenitors.

BUT the permission of prosperous wickedness is of still further use, and greatly serviceable to the cause of virtue itself; a great wicked man is a kind of touchstone

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set up for the trial of the real worth of those around him; and while he gives to some an opportunity to discover their baseness and venality by flattering his passions and promoting his sinful pleasures, he affords a fair occasion to others to shew their integrity, by opposing his unjust pretences by honest advice and serious reproof of his licentious courses; and where these succeed not, or may not be seasonable, by a proper contempt of such guilty greatness; by a conduct formed in opposition to it, and by an adherence to truth, and a perseverance in the cause of virtue against all the authority and influence of the highest examples. If such a conduct is dangerous, and has sometimes proved fatal to the person of the owner, yet it fixes the greatest notoriety, and most distinguished infamy to his character.

IF a bad world is the field of battle where virtue sometimes falls, yet in its fall it conquers and triumphs; as without such enemies

enemies to contend with, it would be like a sword rusting in the scabbard, a light, if a light, in a dark place, a candle hid under a bushel; a cold, a formal, obscure and insipid thing, such as inhabits the walls of a cellar or a cloyster, a spectre that affrights, rather than charms or allures you; as being without grace, or apparent excellence in itself; bringing little benefit to mankind, or glory to God. A Nero, or a Domitian forms heroes, saints and martyrs; while security and peace lulls virtue to an indolence and indifference, an apathy and languor, which makes it dubious to determine whether it is alive or dead. But the permission of prosperous wicked men opens a field, for the passive as well as the active virtues; for faith and patience as well as integrity and courage; when accidents befall us that are common to mankind, and agreeable to the usual course of nature, we bear them without murmur or complaint; not only because they are common, but because we are persuaded they are permitted by

the Providence of that God, whose power it were vain to resist, whose wisdom it were folly to dispute, and whose goodness in other respects it were ungrateful not to acknowledge. But when we are opposed and oppressed by the arbitrary, the lawless and overbearing malice of man; when not mercy, but cruelty bears the sword, and injustice and partiality hold the balance, and tyranny uncontrolled lays the land desolate; whilst liberty drags the chain, virtue is prescribed, and truth put to silence or consigned to a dungeon or the flames: when, as Job expresseth it, “some
“remove the land-marks, and violently
“take away flocks, and feed thereof: they
“drive away the ass of the fatherless, they
“take the widow’s ox for a pledge: they
“turn the needy out of the way; the poor
“of the earth hide themselves together:
“they cause the naked to lodge without
“cloathing, that they have no covering in
“the cold: they pluck the fatherless from
“the breast, and take a pledge of the poor;
“which

“ which make oil within their walls, and
“ tread their wine-presses, and suffer thirst ;
“ men groan out of the city, and the soul
“ of the wounded crieth out ; yet God
“ layeth not folly to them :” that is, says
Bishop Patrick, God who knoweth all this
does not make them, that is, these wicked
men, examples of his displeasure ; such a
scene of things as this, which has some-
times a place in the moral world, if it gives
distress and agony to the speculative mind,
and stabs to the heart, like the sword of a
tyrant, yet it ennobles our faith, which had
been less distinguished under a different ad-
ministration.

SUPPOSE for instance, the robber restrain-
ed from all acts of violence, the unjust judge
from all abuse of authority, and the tyrant
from all excess and exorbitance of power ;
the hand of God being thus visible in your
protection and preservation, you would have
less room for trust in his word, or faith in
his promises, or for hope and earnest ex-
pectation of future and better things, under

circumstances of present distress less grievous and afflicting. Besides, this arbitrary restraint of wicked men from public acts of violence, though it might leave them no less guilty in the eye of God, might render their future punishment more disputable in the sight of men and angels; and thus in heaven itself we might entertain doubts concerning the equity of Providence; and the punishment inflicted in hell appearing arbitrary, might make us suspect our own happiness as precarious; whereas actual, successful and prosperous wickedness, as it is one of the best proofs in nature of a future state of retribution, so it will render the punishment of sinners in that state, beyond any doubt just and unexceptionable. Remembring that the worthless "rich man has in his life-time received his good things, and likewise " Lazarus evil things," we shall not, as we should otherwise think the one unreasonably comforted, or the other unjustly tormented.

I MAY

DISCOURSE IX. 247

I MAY further observe, if I have not already done it, that these good things, or this prosperity sometimes annexed to wickedness is necessary, and essential to the constitution and existence of virtue itself; for supposing vice to be an evil attended with misery both in the act and in the issue, where would be the temptation to it, or where the virtue of resisting it? Had luxury and lust no gratification; had knavery no gains, and corruption no bribes, where would appear the worth, nay the very names and natures would be lost, of sobriety and self-denial, of disinterested integrity, and honest poverty? To conquer a world that had no enemy to oppose you, no pomps or pleasures to charm and attract, no riches to bribe, and no falsehood to ensnare you, would be a victory, if a victory, without a triumph; or a triumph that could pretend to neither reward nor glory.

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DISCOURSE X.

JEREMIAH xii. i.

*Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead
with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy
judgments: wherefore doth the way of the
wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they
happy, who deal very treacherously?*

BUT let us come still closer to the
point in question, and consider more
attentively what blessings they are, which
the wicked really do enjoy, and which
are

are objected as in their possession, to the Providence of God.

I. WHEN it is said, “ they are healthy
“ and strong, they are not in trouble as
“ other men, neither are they plagued
“ like other men:” this is the language of
passion and discontent, and not the real
state and condition of wicked men as such.
Vice, it can never be truly said, is fitted to
promote the health and strength of the bo-
dy; but on the other hand we may affirm
from known and daily experience, from
the constitution of the human frame, and
from the clearest principles of the medical
art, that nothing so much contributes to
impair the health and strength, and to pro-
pagate diseases and death among mankind,
as the vices and excesses committed in con-
tradiction to the voice of reason, the dic-
tates of conscience and the commands of
God. Health and strength, chearful spi-
rits and length of days are well known ge-
nerally to attend on those, who have employ-
ed

ed their time usefully and innocently, and not exceeded the measures of nature and the laws of heaven in their conduct, their living and enjoyments; and for this reason, the poor who are inured to sobriety and industry, are generally more happy in their health and spirits, than their more opulent, indolent and dissolute neighbours, who besides the distempers consequent upon ease and indulgence, are frequently visited with imaginary pains and fanciful complaints, as uneasy and affecting perhaps, as more real disorders and more pungent sorrows.

2. BUT the wicked are promoted to honours, and make a figure in the higher stations of life. But honour surely is absurdly ascribed to the wicked, as such, while moral distinctions, and the dictates of sober reason have any place or authority in the world. A bad man may indeed be raised to place and title, may be decked with ribbands and feathers, and thus become the object of the flattery of knaves,
and

and of the admiration of fools; but he must still be the scorn or pity of the wise and good. The honest cottager is in the eye of reason, not only the greater, but the happier man than the most splendid villain. Tiberius was an Emperor, and so was Caligula; but do they therefore attract your envy and admiration? Or were they not monsters, whose very names strike you with horror, and whose memory will be accursed, while a sense of humanity remains in the world. Were these men exalted? Yes, to infamy and detestation, to the curse of their own and of all succeeding ages. Or, will you object the happiness of these men to the righteousness and goodness of Providence? you see them then in a false light, and not in that point of view, in which God seems to have held them out to the observation of mankind; as examples at the same time of the greatest guilt, and the greatest misery; as degraded and exposed by their exaltation to imperial power, and hurried on to madness by their possession of imperial fortune; surrounded
with

with guards and armies, yet not less a terror to themselves, than to all around them: tyrants raised above all, yet afraid of all men; despising the gods, yet trembling at the voice of heaven, flying to rocks and solitudes, and the most unseemly retreats, to hide from the vengeance they apprehended, because conscious they deserved it; distracted by terrors of mind, which they owned themselves unable to express, tormented themselves and tormenting others in such a manner, as speaks them to have been possessed, influenced by the rage, and subjected to the punishment of devils, rather than discharging the duties, and sharing in the happiness of rational beings.

YET if riches could make man happy, for these are objected to Providence as in the hands of the wicked, who bid fairer for happiness, than those lords of nature, and masters of the revenues of an extensive empire? One* of these monsters was so enamoured of wealth, that he is said to have

* Caligula.

have rolled himself in transport upon his heaps of gold. Yet so far was he from happiness, that he wanted even the common repose of nature, indulged to the meanest of his slaves. Guilt seems to have haunted his dreams, and alarmed his slumbers; and you see him starting from his bed, and a spectre of horror ranging the midnight palace in wild affright and distraction.

I WILL not attempt to vindicate Providence at the expence of truth and reason; nor affirm any such paradox, as that riches are no benefit or blessing, when they are promised as such to the good man: "Riches
"and plenteousness shall be in his house:" But this we may venture to affirm, that riches in the hands of the wicked, and wickedly applied, are rather a curse than a blessing. The rich man of this character and avaricious spirit labours perhaps under some peculiar disadvantages: not to mention that the travail he has undergone in acquiring his wealth, the trouble and anxiety
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he has in securing it, and the fear and torment he must undergo at the prospect of losing and leaving it, which he is sure to do, must more than counter-balance the pleasure of possession: so that it is not without reason and propriety, that some languages, have given to this man, the peculiar epithet of a wretch.

BUT let us suppose wealth in the hands of the wicked of a more liberal turn, who have hearts to produce it at the demand of appetite, and to expend and apply it to the service of their lusts, and do you therefore call these men happy? Do you esteem the proud happy; or do you imagine those to be so, who riot to excess, and indulge to debauch at the expence of virtue, decency, health and character? Do you envy, or would you wish to be of the number of these happy men? Can he be a friend to the interests of virtue, as the objector would seem to be on this occasion? Can any rational and philosophical enquirer maintain, that
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stoth and luxury, pride and insolence, cruelty and oppression, with all the extravagancies and follies in fashion, which are the too general effects of riches, are proper appendages to virtue, when they are at first sight inconsistent with and destructive of virtue? Let the wicked be opulent, as you suppose them, and as they sometimes are, but are they therefore happy? Do the wicked as such, raise them to what wealth and eminence you please, enjoy more health, a better air or brighter skies, more chearful meals, securer slumbers, or sweeter repose than their virtuous, though poorer neighbours? And are they not exposed to the dreadful consequences of their vices, the greatest bane of human happiness, and from which the virtuous are altogether exempt; remorse of conscience, guilty fears, and a distracted, or at best a vain, a trifling and irregular spirit? We generally behold the great wealthy with a partial and malignant eye, and from mere envy ascribe to them a happiness, to which they are entire strangers.

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We judge from appearances and outward shew, from pomp, from glitter and noise, but see not their inward agony, their pining cares, their secret jealousies and numerous passions and incidents, which often prey upon the heart, and make it “even in the midst of laughter sorrowful.” These gay great people, methinks resemble the description which some travellers have given us of one of the first cities in the world,* presenting to the eye at a distance aspiring towers, lofty palaces and gilded minarets, with other tokens of magnificence and splendor; but as you advance and look nearer into the real state, and the inward constitution or construction of the place, you find yourself more disgusted than pleased with the narrowness, the dirt and darkness of the streets, and disappointed in all your gay expectations: thus deceived and equally disappointed you would certainly find yourself, could you possibly enter into the real condition,

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* Constantinople.

the state, the temper and spirit of the guilty great, whom you here object and produce as instances and examples of prosperous wickedness.

WITHOUT sincere friends, and honest servants, they are generally addressed by designing sycophants, and attended by flattering slaves; for their own example can exact no truth or sincerity from their dependents; nor can they be served in their vicious practices by any but the vicious: their usual enjoyments are those of the animal kind, arising from the gratification of passions, which they have in common with the brutes, and which the brutes gratify without violating reason, contracting guilt, or wounding honour and conscience. Ambition and avarice indeed may seem vices peculiar to the man or the rational being; but the cares, the danger and anxiety which attend them, do more than overbalance the gratification of these passions, if they are ever gratified; for avarice is still hoarding,
and

DISCOURSE X. 259

and ambition is still aspiring, till it meets with its common fate, a fall, and even while it stands, the ground it holds is so slippery, as to yield neither rest nor security.

FOR the other supposed blessings of prosperous wickedness, and whose possessors pretend to enjoyment, they are such as follow, high flavoured luxury, gay riot and debauch, pompous and magnificent edifices, with the glare and splendor of dress and equipage : which supposing them to be as great and substantial, as pining envy and a warm imagination paint them, can they compare with the pleasures and blessings of virtue and religion, which in the present case they must necessarily exclude ; sobriety of thought and the calm of retreat ; serenity of soul and peace of conscience ; a heart devoted to the love of God and man ; immortal hopes and heavenly aspirations ? But in fact the blessings of the wicked are no such real blessings as they are imagined ;

the heart of these men is frequently in the midst of laughter sorrowful: their abundance palls and surfeits, rather than gratifies: they anticipate the wants and calls of nature: they eat before they are hungry, and repose before they are weary: appetite is cloyed and surfeited by perpetual indulgence; and they become strangers even to the genuine pleasures of nature, for want of that labour and those relays, which give poignancy to the most homely meal, and sincere slumbers to a bed of straw. Greatness itself is an incumbrance, which no wise man who aims at true happiness, would wish to be acquainted with; it is engrossed by public business and ceremony, wearied out with public cares, and distracted by different pretensions; it is envied, it is opposed, it is calumniated; it keeps its hold with difficulty; it is subject to the jealous scrutiny of the public eye; it acts its part with danger and is exposed to continual attacks from contending factions; in the mean time it is a stranger to the comforts

forts of domestic life, unacquainted with the pleasures of friendship and philosophic ease, and not at leisure to admit into its thoughts and consideration, the awful, the important principles of religion, with the sincerest blessings of our present, and the interest of our immortal state. Such is the true picture, though in miniature, of human grandeur: but add guilt to greatness, and we shall no longer envy, much less object to the goodness of Providence, the happiness of these men in whom these qualities are united; that is, the guilty great: behold them without firmness or dignity while they stand; without support or comfort, if they fall; now exposing themselves by mad temerity; now betraying themselves by abject cowardice; for every villain is a coward. Behold the guilty great exercising their cruelty from a principle of cowardice; wasting their time at best in trifles to murder the voice of reason, and the calls of conscience; deriving significance only from their infamy, and exercising their power

er only in doing mischief or injustice; aiming at security from their cruelty, which at the same time that it crushes the old, excites new enemies; giving vent to their misery by making others miserable; tormenting, and tormented themselves by the same passions; rendered poor and miserable by their avarice; restless through their ambition; pining through envy, burning with lust; stung with malice; torpid by their indulgence; hurt on every occasion by their pride, or hurried on to madness by their revenge. Behold these guilty great, not only in the indulgence, but in the consequence of their crimes; insulting, yet afraid of man; despising, yet trembling at the voice of heaven; affected scorers of religion, yet sometimes subject to the grossest and most childish superstitions: stifling conscience, yet subject to its lashes. Behold these guilty great, surrounded with the works of God, yet without wonder and transport; in public without serenity or real joy; in solitude without entertainment or peace;

peace; in sickness without comfort and support; and in death without relief, resource, or confidence.

SUCH is generally the state of guilty greatness, in which I have not included those fatal calamities and signal horrors of guilt, which sometimes attend it, and bespeak the peculiar vengeance of God. And is this the prosperity of the wicked, which you object to Providence? Would you have virtue and innocence thus circumstanced, and attended with this train of misery? No, you say, you would have the pure blessings now in the possession of the virtuous, inseparably annexed to the just and good. See here how absurd and unreasonable you are: you would give power and pre-eminence to the humble and meek; you would indulge a full range of the pleasures of sense to the mortified and pure in heart; you would give the riches of this world to the heavenly-minded, and make those the servants of mammon, who are now the chil-

dren of God. Thus you would make that the reward which is the scorn of virtue, and the averſion and contempt of every good man's heart ; you would make humility a lord, and chaſtity a baſhaw: charity an uſurer ; ſobriety a ſot, and mortification an epicure ; and to thoſe who are ſtrangers and pilgrims upon earth you would aſſign lands and tenements, to draw them from heaven, and to fix their affections here below.

FOR ſuppoſing the righteous to receive their good things in this life, in proportion to their virtues ; what reaſonable hope could they entertain of a recompence and reward in an immortal ſtate ; a reward upon this ſuppoſition, for no ſuffering ; a recompence for no labour undergone in the cauſe of God and his truth ?

BESIDES, not only the reward and puniſhment, but the very nature and morality of vice and virtue, would be deſtroyed by ſuch an exact diſcrimination of the right-
eous

cous and wicked in the present world, as you require. For the wicked punished in every instance, and in the instant act of every transgression; for any delay of punishment must upon the objector's principles be for the time deemed prosperous wickedness: I say, such instant punishment invariably overtaking transgressors, would amount to a natural kind of necessity, operating like the other laws of nature, irresistibly upon the human machine; and not a moral obligation, which must admit liberty and choice, reason and reflection, in those who are the subjects of it. In this case, if there were no vice, there would be little or no virtue or religion in the world: mankind would act and live by fight, not by faith; they would not so properly be said to detest the crime, as the punishment; and not so much to respect the law, as to dread the executioner. But as transgressors of this sort, void of reason and reflection, could not reasonably be subjected to the penalty and punishment of transgressors; so the obedience

ence of men, convinced, and as I may say necessarily impelled by the certainty of an equal and instant punishment to avoid every transgression, could give little pretence or title to a reward; as such punishment must at the same time exempt them from all future account.

It has been observed already, that the prosperity you object to Providence in the possession of the wicked, is what the righteous neither could nor would enjoy; and this deserves to be more insisted upon. For instance, could the mortified christian indulge to luxury and the pleasures of taste? Could the pure in heart revel in lewdness, or want to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof? Could he who has renounced the world, delight himself in the multitude of his riches, and satisfy his soul with the reflection, that he had much goods laid up for many years? Could he who is clothed with humility, enjoy himself in the pride, the pomp and pleasures of this world?

world ? Or, could the meek and merciful require power and authority to enable him to crush his enemies, and revenge the injuries done him ? in short, could the disciples of that Master, who has declared that his kingdom is not of this world, set up their rest on earth, and fix their affections on things below ?

THUS the prosperity which you seem to envy the wicked, is such as is incompatible with the character, the graces and spirit of the righteous ; and if it is thus inconsistent with the exercise of their virtues, it would be as little fitted to be their reward : for as it is evident and demonstrable from the history and experience of the past, and from the evidence of present times, that wickedness is by the course of nature and by the general order of God's Providence, the common and usual cause of all the misery that is in the world ; so it is not less manifest that nothing contributes so much to the relaxation of virtue, and the promoting of
licen-

licentiousness and wickedness, as an abundance of the good things which a man possesseth; in requiring this abundance for the righteous, you would only attempt to corrupt their virtue, and in proportion must diminish their happiness.

I DARE appeal to the virtuous and religious themselves, whose cause you would seem to defend, whether they would exchange their temperate meals, their sober hours, their humility and poverty of spirit, their retirements, private meditations, mortification and prayer, for the luxury and dissipation, for the pomp the power and pre-eminence in public life, or for all the riches, and the kingdoms of this world, and their glories? Your concern for the righteous on this occasion, is therefore unnecessary and impertinent; leave them to their God, whose comforts they find abundantly sufficient to delight their souls; and let the wicked continue unenvied in the possession of their riches and

and honours; sufficient unto them is the evil thereof; guilt poisons all their enjoyments, clouds their brightest prospects and embitters their sweetest cup of pleasure: the present uncertain and flying hour is their all; in futurity they have no hope; in the prospect before, above, or below them they have no comfort; in God they have no confidence; in heaven they have no refuge, and in the grave itself no assurance of repose and peace; their very joys are turbulent, fleeting, and superficial, they generally leave a sting behind them, and are purchased at the expence of health, fortune, honour and conscience.

WITH this prosperity of the wicked, you therefore charge God foolishly; it is rather a vindication of, than an objection to his righteous Providence, since it banishes the truest comforts and sincerest pleasures of this life, and excludes, the blessed hope and all-joyful expectation of a better. The wicked, though prosperous,
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are generally miserable: thus it should be, to testify the displeasure of a holy God against sin; but they are not universally so, and sin has its pomps and pleasures, such as they are; this too is as it should be, otherwise there would be no temptation to transgress, and consequently no virtue in resistance, nor any trial of faith in the promises, or of obedience to the righteous laws of God.

BUT we cannot imagine a fairer field for the exercise and triumph of virtue, than that wherein we see it engaged, and superior to the scornful reproach of the wealthy and the despitefulness of the proud. With what lustre, does the faith of the first, and some of the latter professors of christianity appear, in their unwearied patience, labours and sufferings, their bonds and imprisonment, in their constancy and courage even in death itself, inflicted by the principalities and powers of this world, and by spiritual wickedness in high places? If not many
rich,

rich, not many mighty were called to the obedience of the gospel, yet they were permitted to contradict and blaspheme it; and were therefore proper instruments in the hand of Providence to confirm it by their opposition, and to demonstrate its power and spirituality, its heavenly energy and miraculous propagation.

THE prosperous wicked have perhaps their still further use in the scheme of Providence. Far be it from me to justify the wicked; yet let us never be ashamed or afraid to confess the truth in the cause and defence of truth: as it has appeared, that the prosperity of the wicked is by no means so considerable as is commonly conceived, so perhaps their very wickedness has been aggravated by passion, by prejudice, by envy, and a spirit of discontent. Thus generosity may be stiled prodigality; a good table, luxury; and a proper dress and equipage, impiety, foppery and folly; easy relaxations may be termed criminal indulgencies, and
innocent

innocent amusements sinful pleasures ; and the honest and reasonable demands of nature gratified, may be condemned as lusts of the flesh, a resistance of grace and opposition to the spirit. Thus have proud and narrow bigots judged and censured in all ages : not once considering, that had they been born under the same circumstances with these wicked whom they condemn, under the influence of the same education, possessed of the same fortunes and honours, and exposed to the same temptations, they themselves might possibly have been guilty of the same conduct, and consequently liable to the same censures.

BUT let the wickedness of the prosperous, and the prosperity of the wicked be as great as you please ; this hurts not the cause of christianity and true religion. This present world is but the first page of the immense volume of the Divine Providence, or perhaps rather an introduction to it : the eternal God acts upon eternal views ; and man short-lived as he is in his present being, is
destined

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destined for an eternal stage : the part he has to act upon earth is momentous, and intended for the trial, not for the final reward of our virtues. Now the only question in which the justice or goodness of Providence is here concerned, respects the easiness or difficulty of the parts assigned, and the proportion of abilities given to the several actors. But here I presume it will be allowed by every true judge of morals, that the rich and prosperous have a much more difficult part to act in working out their salvation, than those of a different and meaner fortune ; and that nothing contributes so much to relax and undermine virtue, the virtue of individuals or general bodies of men and nations, as prosperity and the pleasures attending an affluent state. Persons modest, or at least decent under adversity, have been frequently seen upon a happier turn of their affairs, carried away into the most unbridled licentiousness and undi-
guised debaucheries : the prince, who was bettered by his better fortune, and the

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great

great subject, who in the height of fortune preserved the moderation of a private life, are mentioned by the best judges,* among the remarkables, and as exceptions to the common course of things, in the history of human nature. The very lowest rank of the people, beset as they are with wants, and necessitated to daily labour for the supply of their scanty meal, you see frequently guilty of the most scandalous excesses, in contempt of all the obligations of morality and religion; how difficult then, how dangerous is the situation of the great and prosperous, early indulged, nurtured in ignorance, or trained up to fashionable follies, led by flattery to vanity and self-complacency, prompted by an imaginary self-sufficiency to pride and insolence; tempted by power to injustice and oppression; melted down by sloth, courted by pleasure, corrupted by luxury, and solicited to riot and every extravagance, by the constant supplies of a
redundant

Vespasian in Tacitus & Turbo in Xiphilin.

redundant fortune, we can scarce wonder that they fall victims to their passions thus pampered; and our Lord can scarce be thought to want a figure of rhetoric to apologize for his declaration; "that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And thus the Apostle might with no less reason assert from a view of moral considerations, "not many rich, not many mighty are called:" for though the calls of the gospel of grace are common to all, and vouchsafed to the rich as well as to the poor; yet the call to the former is so stifled and deadened by the noise and business, the pomps and pleasures of the world; that though they hear, they do not perceive or understand. In this light, the great and opulent as subjects of God's eternal kingdom, and in this light only religion holds them out to us, are objects of our pity rather than of our envy, as their future eternal allotment may seem a more plausible ground for objections than their

present momentary prosperity : for what are the blessings, if you pronounce the wicked blessed, what are the blessings and joys of a day, of an hour, a moment, compared with the endless ages of eternity ? For consider the days that are past, and the ages that have been long since swept away by the rapid flood, and swallowed up by the insatiable gulph of time ; and say what and where are now the great and mighty ones of this world ? Their pomp is brought down to the grave, and the worm hath long since covered them. What does it now avail them, as inhabitants of the eternal world, that they in their lifetime received their good things, except that the remembrance may possibly enhance their pains, and aggravate their sufferings ? And will you after this envy and object to Providence the happiness and prosperity of the wicked ? It would become you rather as christians indeed, to pity their situation, to be sorry for their circumstances, to view their dangers with horror, to trem-
ble

ble at their fate, and lament their misery.

AND may you, to whom God hath given more abundant fortunes and honours, “be “not high-minded, but fear;” consider yourselves as placed indeed on higher, yet withal on more slippery and dangerous ground; exposed and open to fiercer assaults, and liable to more probable and dreadful ruin, than those whom you are apt to look down upon as of a lower order, and the very dregs of the creation. Your journey through life is beset with more snares, your moral frame obnoxious to more disorders, and your virtues put to a severer trial, than is the lot of ordinary mortals: hard is the task of self-denial amidst the means of self-gratification; of a firm adherence to virtue amidst the attacks of flattery; of sobriety and activity amidst the temptations to sloth, luxury and excess; of humility amidst the suggestions to pride; of equity and moderation in the exorbitancy of power; in short,

arduous must be your efforts, and uncommon your labour, to be retired amidst the bustle, to be untainted amidst the corruption, and devout amidst the impiety of the world; and to exert a pure and steady virtue, in opposition to the various and strongest allurements to vice.

WOULD you make a proper use of your condition and circumstances? You have an ample field for victory and glory; which will shine the brighter for the opposition you have to encounter, and the enemies you have to engage with in exerting your honest ambition to gain the prize of immortality; you may be the guardians and protectors of mankind, and as ministering angels in the government of God; by your example, by your virtues, your humanity, your beneficence and devotion, you may be a kind of saviours both of the bodies and souls of your fellow-creatures. Thus will you vindicate Providence against those illiberal objections, which your licentious conduct
and

and irreligious course of life contributed to raise against it.

To conclude this discourse; let the Providence of God be magnified by all, in this its distribution of the good things of this world. If God has given more abundance to some, from them he requires the more; the rich and poor are made to be subservient to each other, and by their several circumstances and mutual relations, put upon exerting talents and virtues peculiar to, and arising from their several stations; industry and modesty, contentment and courage, patience and resignation, are duties not more incumbent on the poor, than equity, humanity, beneficence and humility, temperance and self-government are necessary on the part of the rich. Suppose that all mankind were equally blessed, as it is called, with wealth or fortune, (for any inequality would still leave room for objection) how would the order of civil life be thereby subverted, and the best, and most

distinguished virtues and graces of the man, and of the christian, be rendered altogether useless, if not impracticable? For in a general and equal abundance whom could we relieve; and were all alike exalted, to whom could we condescend? Whom should we find willing to discharge the lower offices of life, to sow our fields, or to plant vineyards to yield us fruits of increase? Must the sheep not only produce the fleece, but ply the loom, and fashion our cloaths? Or, would we have heaven to rain down upon us, as of old, bread ready prepared for our use, and “the angels of God to come and “minister unto us?”

SAY, that all were alike opulent, who must be left to build and decorate our houses? Who must serve or obey, where all had equal title to command? But this equality is not, you say, what you require; and only demand that the wicked should not be the prosperous upon earth: you have your request, if by prosperous you understand

stand happy : for that no wicked man ever was, or can be so, has been maintained by the very moral masters of heathenism, and is demonstrable upon the principles of our christian school. Most absurdly do you require the humble, the meek and lowly followers of the crucified Jesus to be "cloathed in purple and fine linen, and "to fare sumptuously every day." This would serve only to destroy, rather than reward their virtue, and is the reward they certainly never aspired after. Besides this, virtue, in order to be rewarded, for the conviction of unbelievers, must be first visible, and of some duration, or carry along with it considerable difficulty : it may therefore imply suffering, and must in time be antecedent to the allotment of reward. In the same manner, and for conviction of the same objectors, the prosperous wicked must have an existence, and some trial, before they can be equitably condemned and turned over to execution.

THE

THE propriety and reasonableness of Abraham's address to the rich man and Lazarus, as recorded in the gospel, must be apparent to the most ordinary discernment, "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." But the impropriety, the absurdity, and injustice of this address transposed, would perhaps be still more striking and apparent: "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now thou art comforted, and he is tormented."

THE present world, considered as our stage of discipline and trial, and the future as the state of recompence and retribution, is then such a constitution of things, as reason itself, the very reason of the objectors, must, one would imagine, consent to and approve: and consequently they must give up, as irrational on many accounts, what

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what is implied in, and demanded by the present objection, that the present world should be a state of compleat and perfect reward. And as in the present demand, you have nature and the course of this world, reason and religion all against you; it were certainly best, and our reasonable part to stifle all such objections, and to be content with the discharge of our proper duty, in the present peace and satisfaction of which, and in the future prospect of honour, glory and immortality, you will find far truer happiness, a more sincere, more sublime, and more substantial joy, than ever was the portion of the most prosperous and splendid transgressor. Certainly no true servant of God ever was, or can be unhappy for the want of those pomps that luxury, opulence and grandeur, which the truest wisdom, as well as truest virtue and religion have always declined and abhorred.

DIS-

DISCOURSE XI.

JUDGES VI. 12, 13.

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

THE complaint of Gideon to the Angel here recorded, is the frequent language of distress: and though complaint and piety

piety seem very inconsistent, yet the religious themselves are not always insensible of sufferings, and not without a visible uneasiness under the severer dispensations of Heaven. But this may be accounted for without any prejudice to religion, and perhaps without admitting any thing greatly criminal in the conduct of the religious: it is of the essence of true religion to enjoin and enforce submission to the will of God; and it is alike essential to the character of the truly religious to pay it: but men may be devout without being insensible; have sorrows yet not without support; and be cast down, yet not in despair: and the more any man has been acquainted with the comforts of God, and satisfied with his presence, the more he must lament under the absence of what was once his hope, his confidence and his joy. Their sorrow, I will dare to say, is not sinful, when it is not for the loss of any temporal, any carnal or fantastic good; but arises from a broken and contrite heart, deeply sensible of God's displeasure, and of his having withdrawn
from

from them the light of his countenance. Here the existence of God is not denied, but his absence deplored; and the unhappy soul laments its being no longer the object of his love, and of having lost all traces of his presence and providence. This seems to have been the case of holy Job, notwithstanding the frequent acknowledgments he makes of the over-ruling power of God: "Behold," says he, "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him."

THE remembrance of mercies past renders a present affliction more grievous; and the very knowledge that God is gracious, gives a keener edge to the calamities of his servants: the former light they have enjoyed, renders the succeeding darkness more dreadful; and the repeated assurances, with the experience, of God's favour and protection to those who love and obey him,

seem

seem to conclude every sufferer to be a sinner, forsaking and forsaken of God; or they perplex the pious believer in reconciling the promises of divine blessing with the present effects which he feels of divine indignation.

UNDER a perplexity of this kind the Psalmist seems to have been on various occasions, and to have expressed it with an anxiety the most natural and pathetic. The seventy-seventh Psalm in particular presents us with a fine picture of a heart religious, yet melancholy, under the deepest convictions of the attributes of God, and most sensibly affected with his supposed absence, and his no concern by a present interposal to remove, or relieve the sorrows of his servants. “When I am in heaviness, “I will think upon God; when my heart “is vexed, I will complain. Thou holdest “mine eyes waking: I am so troubled that “I cannot speak: I have considered the days “of old, and the years that are past: I call “to

“to remembrance my song; and in the
 “night I commune with my own heart,
 “and search out my spirits. Will the
 “Lord absent himself for ever; and will
 “he be no more intreated? Is his mercy
 “clean gone for ever; and is his promise
 “come utterly to an end for evermore?
 “Hath God forgotten to be gracious; and
 “will he shut up his loving kindness in
 “displeasure?”

AND again in the eighty-ninth psalm and
 the forty-ninth verse, the holy penman ex-
 postulates in a stile and manner not unlike to
 that of Gideon in the text: “Lord, where
 “are thy former loving kindnesses, which
 “thou swarest to David in thy truth?” The
 case of such complainers, I shall therefore
 consider as an infirmity, as the Psalmist
 stiles it in himself, and as a misfortune ra-
 ther than a fault, deserving our pity rather
 than our censure; it is indeed a calamity
 the greatest of all others, which can for the
 present befall mankind. The wicked, if

they are not blessed with the comforts of God's presence, neither are they much troubled at their absence; the spirit of a man will sustain the common infirmities of his nature, but a spirit thus wounded and smitten of God, who can bear? I shall therefore endeavour in the following discourse to administer comfort to such dejected souls, and to shew them both from reason and religion, that their present afflictions are very consistent with God's providential care over them, and with his paternal concern for their best and most lasting happiness.

“ If the Lord be with us, said Gideon,
“ why then is all this befallen us? and where
“ be all his miracles, which our fathers told
“ us of?” In this objection or complaint,
there is a mistake,

1. OF the nature and attributes of God;
 2. OF the nature and present state of Man.
- I. THE

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1. THE complaint supposes that wherever God is present, (as he was in an especial manner with the Jewish people) there nothing is to be felt or experienced but the effects of his favour and loving-kindness: but God is just as well as good; and if he is merciful, he is also holy. This is manifest both from the particular dispensations of God, and from the general course of his Providence. If he was in an especial manner present with the Israelites in delivering them from their slavery in Egypt, in conducting them through the red sea and through the wilderness, in subduing their enemies before them, and giving them at last a peaceable settlement “in a land flowing with milk and honey,” he was not less present to punish their lust and murmurings, their unbelief, and frequent relapses into idolatry. And in the government of the rest of the world, though “he hath
 “not left himself without witness, in that
 “he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts

“with food and gladness:” yet by fire, and flood, and drought, by war, famine, and pestilence, he gives frequent evidence of his just indignation against sin, and that “he hateth all the workers of iniquity.” While then we are attentive to the promises, we should not forget the divine threatnings, and till we are perfectly holy, which was not the case in Gideon’s time, nor has been in any time since, we must not expect to be perfectly happy.

THE promises of God are not absolute but conditional; they are made, and will be assuredly made good to all those who love him, who believe and trust in him, and make use of the means he has appointed both by nature and grace, for the attainment of his blessings. But the religious may either exceed, or fall short in the prosecution of their duty, and so justly forfeit the rewards of religion. They may rely so much on the means of grace, as to neglect the order and measures of nature ;
for

for instance, they may expect, that mere devotion of soul should preserve, or repair the frame, and supply all the wants of the body ; demanding as it were health without exercise, and food without labour : their trust in God may be presumption, while they overlook the ordinary means of preservation which he has put into their power, and call for such miraculous interpositions as he has no where promised ; their very zeal for his glory may be conducted without reason or prudence, and thus while they hope for the rewards of piety, they may reap the just fruits of their rashness and folly. If through passion, which we may call piety, or through pride, which we may term zeal, we incur danger or damage, or provoke persecution ; we shall in vain expect some divine manifestation to assert our cause, or a miraculous interposition to deliver us from the flood, or from the flames. To require the blessing of God upon a course of conduct, which neglects or violates the order of things, which he

has established, is to require that God should contradict himself, and to give a sanction and encouragement to the breach of his own laws.

It is to be lamented, that the most religious, I should rather say the most superstitious, for true religion is always rational in its views, are often the most absurd, and thence the most deceived in their expectations of this kind: they read of miracles and angelic appearances frequently vouchsafed in the primitive times, for the first establishment of God's special dispensations, and to confirm the faith of an infant world in divine truth, and the over-ruling Providence of a righteous God. Full of these ideas, and yet in very different circumstances to those of the Patriarchs, or the founders of the Jewish and Christian church, they cry out in the language of Gideon, "Where are all his miracles, which our fathers told us of?" Requiring the same visible manifestations of the divine power and presence, to confirm

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as it should seem, what has been already confirmed, and to prove what has been made evident to a demonstration. If you are to be the example, the founder, and the patron of a new religion, to a new race of men rising up in the midst of an idolatrous world, you may then expect the special blessings of Abraham. If you alone, as acceptable in the sight of God, are to be delivered from the midst of an abominable city, ready to be destroyed by fire from heaven, you may then expect notice of it by angel-messengers, who shall conduct you to a place of safety, as they did Lot. If you alone as righteous, are to be saved from a flood of waters that shall cover the whole earth, and destroy all flesh, you may expect the same warning, and the same protecting and preserving Providence, that was vouchsafed to Noah. Or, if you are commissioned by Heaven to lead a new people of Israel under the same circumstances as the old, from another land of Egypt, you have a right to expect the same powers and cre-

dentials as Moses had. I will add, that whenever you are, in consequence of your obedience to a special call of God, in the same situation as the Israelites were, with the armies of the Egyptians behind and the sea before, you may expect that the waters will divide and be a wall unto you on your right hand and on your left to give you a passage. Or, if for bearing testimony to the truth of God in the midst of an idolatrous nation, you are cast into a den of lions, you may expect that God will send his angel, and shut the lions' mouths, and deliver you as he did Daniel. But I would observe in general of both Prophets and Apostles, that the miracles they wrought, or which God wrought by them, were chiefly wrought upon others for the general confirmation of divine truth, and not for their own personal protection or deliverance. For they appear to have been, in St. Paul's language, "a spectacle to angels, and to men." And in respect to their hopes in this life, "of all men the most miserable." And not only the first but succeeding martyrs

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martyrs suffered death with tranquillity, I may say with transport, calling upon God to receive their souls, without any hope or desire expressed of a present deliverance for their bodies.

YET clear and strong promises, it must be allowed, are made in sacred writ, of God's particular care and concern for the righteous ; that " his eyes are always upon them, " and his ears are open unto their prayers : " and examples are not wanting of his special Providence interposing for the deliverance of his servants under imminent danger and distress. Why this interposal was in the more early ages of the world, miraculous, and by the visible Hand of Heaven, you have already seen : to which I may add, that the knowledge of a future state and distribution being then more shadowed and obscured, made it necessary, that the divine justice in present allotments to the righteous and the wicked should appear more conspicuous : and yet even in these times of primitive

mitive ignorance, and still more in the advanced and enlightened ages of the world, and especially where the blessing conveyed was personal, and not intended to confirm the public faith; we find, I say, the mercy conveyed in a way that appears rather natural than miraculous; in a way that removes the wants, and relieves the distresses of the sufferer, without gratifying his curiosity, or feeding his pride, or encouraging his presumption; in a way that does not indeed in the present act, but in the effect and consequence prove itself to be really divine. Thus Joseph was delivered from the pit, and from the further conspiracies of his brethren, by the coming past of the Ishmaelites; as he was afterwards discharged from his confinement in prison, and introduced into Pharaoh's presence by the chief butler's remembrance of his dream, and the interpretation. And thus the infant Moses was preserved from perishing in the river by Pharaoh's daughter coming down to walk upon its banks. Now these deliverances seemed to be merely casual,

casual, or the effect of chance; yet they were plainly special interpositions of God's Providence, when we consider for what great ends both Joseph and Moses were preserved. I shall but mention one instance more of this kind out of many that might be produced. When David and his men were pursued, and in a manner surrounded by Saul and his men in the wilderness of Maon, we find no destroying angel sent to discomfit the army of Saul, nor any visible miracle exerted to deliver David from the hands of his pursuer. "But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David." In this case you see plainly the Providence of God interposing for the preservation of his servant, and a signal mercy vouchsafed without the appearance of a miracle. If the Apostles of our Lord were sometimes delivered from prison in a miraculous manner, this is not to be considered as a special act of God's

God's Providence, interposing only for the security of their persons ; but as a miracle, and like the other miracles recorded in the Gospel, intended to give evidence and authority to the truth of christianity ; in whose defence and propagation these Apostles afterwards laid down their lives.

THERE is something of impropriety, if not of absurdity, in the notion of public miracles required to be wrought for the sole use of private persons. Such miracles at last would reflect on the wisdom of God, and bring little comfort in general, or satisfaction to man : for if they convinced one man, they would confound thousands to whom they had no relation, and to which they would all think they had an equal right. And let us suppose such miracles vouchsafed to every particular man according to his several wants, they would then cease to be miraculous, and be considered as parts of the general course of nature. But let them still retain the precise nature of miracles,
when

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when thus appropriated to the general wants of men, they would reflect on the wisdom of God, in the formation and government of the world, and in the promulgation and proof of his particular dispensations ; he not having sufficiently provided by the former for the general wants and comfort, nor in the latter for the general conviction of mankind ; doubts still remaining to be removed, and distresses to be relieved, which the Divine Wisdom and Power would not, or could not prevent.

IF it should be still urged against what is here advanced both from reason and example, that we overlook what lies so near us, the example of Gideon in the text, I reply, that when you have the same call and commission from God, as Gideon had, which is impracticable, and are in the same circumstances of time and place, which it is impossible should ever be, you will then have a right to the same demand, and the same compliance with it as Gideon had.

And

And the same reply will be a sufficient answer to most, if not all the instances of the same kind produced from the Old and New Testaments.

It may be further observed, that such a miraculous procedure constantly observed in the divine administration, might argue a God of partiality and injustice: for we having the experience of the present, as well as the testimony of all past times to the authority of divine truth, should have an evidence far superior to that of Gideon and the Patriarchs; and in this respect every succeeding age would have a still growing advantage over its predecessors.

WHAT irregularity such perpetual miracles must produce in nature, and what effects on the faith and morals of mankind, I shall not stay to enumerate, being only at present concerned to consider why good men are not miraculously delivered from distress; or why indeed distress is at any time

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time allowed to be the good man's lot in life; for into this the complaint resolves itself at last; and every complainer on this subject, expostulates in the language of Gideon: "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?"

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to

DISCOURSE XII.

JUDGES vi. 12, 13.

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

IT has, it must be owned at first sight a startling appearance, and may be apt to raise doubts and dejection in a well-

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disposed.

disposed mind, to see virtue depressed, and perhaps labouring for a long time under a course of oppression or calamity, and righteousness persecuted for righteousness sake. It seems to contradict all our natural notions of the divine justice, goodness and moral government, and to cancel all the promises of God's special grace, protection and favour made to the righteous.

To remove this objection, and thereby give comfort to the desponding, courage to the dejected, and consolation to the doubtful mind, shall be the business of the following discourse.

I. VIRTUE may be distressed, but it is not generally, and indeed very rarely the cause of distress. It is on the contrary, by the constitution of God in nature, generally productive of happiness; and health, fortune, security and honour are the common and usual consequences of a faithful discharge of our moral and religious duty. Or, who
is

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is there that can charge temperance and chastity, honour, industry and frugality, the love of God and man, with effects ruinous to his estate or reputation, to the soundness of his body, or the tranquillity of his mind? If virtue is distressed, it is mostly so in an unnatural state, when obstructed in its operations, and deprived of its proper and natural fruits. If virtue is distressed, it is not by its friends, but its enemies, the vicious and the wicked; who first raise, and then charge Heaven with a persecution against her. In this case Cain murders Abel, and then calumniates Providence with the untimely, and violent death of the righteous.

2. IT is from vice then, that virtue receives its principal distress: so it has been and so it must be while vice and virtue remain in the world: "for what communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" A character of distinguished eminence for probity and piety

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is a silent reproach to treacherous and wicked men, raises their envy and provokes their malice and revenge: their weak eyes cannot bear such superior lustre, which dazzles and confounds them, and turns them upon themselves; where they see something upon the comparison too black, base and contemptible, to be beheld with pleasure, or born with patience. If Joseph is distinguished for his filial piety and youthful wisdom, he provokes the hatred of his brethren to murder or sell him into Egypt: if the son of Jesse gains the hearts of the men of Israel, and the public applause by his martial conduct, and the eminent services done to his country, Saul eyes David from that time, and seeks an occasion to slay him.

BUT besides its own native splendour, true virtue has in it a warmth and activity, which carries it out to reprove the vices of others, and to restrain, if possible, the common licentiousness. The true friend to religion

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religion and its interests, to God and his truth, will not sit by and see wickedness practised, or hear blasphemy and profaneness spoken, without resentment and proper reproof. St. Paul acted only suitably to his character at Athens, when seeing the city wholly given to idolatry, his spirit was stirred within him, and he declared himself publicly against the reigning superstition and impiety.

2

HENCE good men have almost as many enemies as there are bad men, who fall under their admonition: for reproof is generally taken, or rather mistaken for reproach; and advice for insult; and thus for the kindness you intended, you have an injury returned: and when power is on the side of an offender, his pride and resentment rise in proportion, and his vengeance falls so much the heavier on the head of his reprover. Hence John the Baptist was cast into prison, and afterwards beheaded, because he had told Herod, that it was not

lawful for him to have his brother Philip's wife : hence the malice of the scribes and pharisees against our blessed Lord, who had so severely and justly reprov'd their hypocrisy and falshood : hence patriots and philosophers have in their turns fallen a sacrifice to the rage of tyrants whom they oppos'd : hence the blood of the prophets was shed round about Jerusalem by the kings of Judah, against whose idolatry and corruptions they bore witness : and hence the horrors of pagan persecution, which rag'd so long against the members of the christian church, who dissented from, and publickly renounced the reigning superstition and fabulous gods of their country. Hence in short it comes to pass, that the best men have been frequently the worst treated ; and banishment and death been the fate of men the most illustrious for virtue and wisdom. And who in these, and in all cases of like kind has a right, if there be a right, to complain against Providence ? The sufferers surely. And yet they by their conduct acquit

quit Heaven : suffering was their choice and their glory ; they might have gone on and prospered in the world by a virtue less severe, and a zeal less fervent and holy : they were willing to die, rather than disobey, deny, or dissemble the truth. Let us then no more object on their account, but let us admire their integrity, and bless God for their heroic examples.

3. THE other calamities, to which mortality is subject, which are not undergone in the cause of virtue, and extend not so far as to the loss of liberty, property and life, are less to be complained of ; they are necessary to man as a moral agent in a state of trial, and to them virtue owes its exercise, and very existence : how could the honest patriot and philosopher have exerted their zeal for truth and public liberty under no falsehood to be opposed, and no tyranny to be resisted ? The most shining virtues of private life must be obscured and buried, without proper occasions to call

them forth, and give them their display and full lustre; what room for patience, was you subject to no pain? or, for alacrity and courage, under no labours to be endured, and no dangers to be undergone? Could forgiveness be a virtue, had you no enemies to forgive? Or how would your meekness appear, had you no provocations to anger? Had the world no wants or woes, what call would there be upon your charity and benevolence? I must add, that without difficulties and distresses, a great part of your duty to God would be entirely cancelled and abolished: was you under no sense of want, or fear of danger, for what could you send up your prayers to heaven? Free from all perplexity, and every dismal appearance in nature, with what propriety could you be said to put your trust in God? Was religion clear of all difficulty and doubt, certain and evident to a demonstration, palpable as the objects of sense, and plain as the easiest deductions of reason, faith would have no being; and hope itself must be
swallowed

swallowed up and lost in the blissful vision of God, and of his future kingdom laid open, and present to your eye.

You see then that to remove your complaint of suffering piety and virtue, you must remove all piety and virtue out of the world. It is to the tempest, the philosopher tells us,* that the pilot owes the applause of his art; and I will add, that without tempests in the moral world, life would be a dead and insipid calm, under which we should languish rather than live, like animals or plants, and not like reasonable beings, who had virtue for their guide, and glory for their end.

4. BUT besides the particular evils of sufferings, to which virtue is, and must be exposed, there are sometimes general calamities, as of war, pestilence, or earthquake; or fire and flood, which involve a city, a country

* Vide Seneca.

country or a kingdom in desolation or ruin : and from these the righteous could not always be delivered without such a visible distinction of favour, or miraculous interposition, as must go nearly to destroy, if it did not totally abolish that liberty, which constitutes the morality of the human conduct. I am persuaded that God does in a particular manner care for the righteous in every exigency : and no good man can look back on his life past, without remembering many signal mercies vouchsafed, and dangers averted, from which he saw no way to escape in the ordinary methods and course of nature. But were good men thus universally delivered and protected, who would not chuse to be of that number ? Not for the sake of goodness, but of the safety and profit it brought along with it. Were the good man's ship always to return into port, free from danger or damage, laden with precious merchandise, or were his fields visited with nothing but temperate showers and sunshine always to laugh and
sing ;

sing; the motives to piety and virtue would
 be a gainful trade, and a plentiful harvest;
 not obedience to the will of God, and
 faith in a world unseen: nay upon this
 scheme of things, the good man being se-
 cured alike in his body as well as his pro-
 perty, and crowned alike with health and
 fortune, and receiving such ample recom-
 pence here for a virtue that cost him little
 or nothing, it might be well doubted, or
 denied, that any reward awaited him here-
 after; and thus this argument which you
 require of a present Providence, might de-
 stroy your hopes of life and immor-
 tality.

5. BUT let us suppose a scheme of things,
 wherein there should be no suffering virtue,
 (though examined to the bottom, it would
 you see destroy both virtue and suffering)
 and let us see whether this would satisfy
 all doubts and remove all objections. Man,
 we know looketh on the outward appear-
 ance, and can look no further; but God
 looketh

looketh on the heart; his rewards therefore must be confined to their sincerity and inward principles, not to their outward profession or seeming sanctity: and thus while he who did his alms in secret would be rewarded openly, the hypocrite's hope must perish in the sight of men; and the most devout formalist might still be the most distinguished sufferer: the monk languishing in his cloyster in a state of indolence, might still labour under distempers of body and mind; the sectary might still suffer under a persecution, which his own imprudence had raised; the bigot might perish in the flames, which his own intemperate zeal had kindled; and the warmest and most violent zealot of every separate party or denomination of the religious, being perhaps overlooked in God's general distributions to sincere virtue wherever found, would still leave occasion of offence to all such, who confine all truth and virtue to their own sect and party: as the false, so real virtue must be frequently in
such

such circumstances as would not clear it in the judgment of the world from real distress : it must, as such, be above all appetite for shewy titles, and the blaze of honours ; it must disdain riches, and abhor what the world calls pleasure ; it must still resist vice, if you leave vice any being, and exert all its vigour against falsehood, and whatever opposes the glory of God, or the good of men. Virtue must therefore, in the judgment of the vulgar, and of these objectors, be still a contemptible, a poor and mortified quality, and exposed, if not to the persecution, yet to the contempt and hatred of mankind.

II.

BUT let us allow, and it must be allowed, that virtue still suffers more than this comes to, is subject to great and lasting calamities, inflicted or permitted by the will of heaven ; and in the relief or removal of which, no hand of God or interposition of
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Providence appears ; the cause of virtue is, I conceive not yet betrayed, nor its patrons at a loss for its defence, and the defence of that God who has enjoined it.

I SHALL not enlarge upon the benefit of afflictions in general ; as I am at this time only considering the particular sufferings of the righteous, which if they can be shewn to be conducive to the great and final good, the supreme and most perfect happiness of the sufferers, they can be no more produced as matter of objection, or the subject of complaint : indeed in a present view of things, they are often productive of many signal advantages, which out-weigh in real value, the more showy circumstances of prosperous wicked men.

It is suffering that gives not only the first seed, but the future growth to many of the most distinguished virtues, that adorn and benefit human life.

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INDEED without distress and what is called misfortune, perhaps there would be little virtue remaining in the world; and by general prosperity you would propagate general immorality and licentiousness among mankind. You at present lament and object the prosperity of the wicked, but perhaps the objection should be against the wickedness of the prosperous: and in proportion as you increased the prosperity of the man, you would increase his pride and insolence, his luxury, sloth and sensuality; and the very virtuous whom you now object to Providence, for being exposed to distress and misery, perhaps owe their very virtues to this misery and distress. For if they who are born to fortunes and honours, are so easily and generally corrupted, what might we not fear from those, whose cause you seem to plead, if elevated to honours and fortunes beyond their expectations, and transplanted from a barren and cold soil and climate to the luxuries of a court, and the sun-shine of princely favour! At present we frequently discover

discover pride in the poorest, insolence in the meanest, and extravagance and foolishness in the lowest class of the people. What then might we not expect, would be the consequence of a larger range of fortune?

BUT we may still advance further, and maintain not without reason, that not only virtue, but even happiness would be destroyed by that prosperity which you seem to require: for do you imagine that tranquillity, contentment, and peace make their abode in the houses of the great, and the palaces of princes? Are not the excess of the human passions the general and greatest source of human misery? And do not the passions bid fairest to run out into excess and extravagance, where they have the greatest incentives to inflame and gratify them? Or would true happiness, according to the best moralists, the genuine effect of true virtue, be the consequence of a situation surrounded by all the temptations of vice? True happiness is certainly a very different thing

thing to what it appears in the popular estimation ; it is a stranger to noise and pomp, to ceremony and equipage, to courts and camps ; and I will venture to add, that the happiness you must demand for the virtuous consistently with their character, will be equally removed from festivity, jollity and the luxuries of sense : true happiness, the greatest happiness man is capable of in a sublunary state, must arise from moral and spiritual considerations ; from a sense of God's favour and gracious Providence ; from the comforts of a good conscience, the firm faith of our christian principles, and the strength of our immortal hopes. No state, no condition or circumstances can exclude you from these, the best blessings of human nature, and next to those which are enjoyed by the angels in heaven. Or, would the sweets of virtue relish more, or the beams of grace and glory shine brighter in a court than in a cottage ? Do you think that David, king David engaged in the cares of greatness, and involved in guilt,

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was

was more happy than the son of Jesse when feeding the flock great with young? Nay, we may venture to affirm, that the greatest princes, whom the world ever knew, never experienced from their greatness, the happiness enjoyed by the meanest subjects, from the practice of sincere virtue, and the principles of a rational religion. A child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, are not only the highest and most honourable titles, but carry in them and convey to the possessors such solid peace and security, such confidence and exalted hopes, such a triumph of heart and sweet composure of the soul, as no elevation of fortune or distinctions on earth can bestow.

BUT that God sometimes visits his servants with outward calamities and temporal afflictions, is no argument of an unequal Providence, or of his neglect and forgetfulness of the righteous; his present administration, if we would judge aright, must be supposed to respect our great, our
final

final and eternal concerns; and his most afflictive dispensations considered in this light, are and should be valued as our happy portion. Would you undergo no labour in the service of your master, and be subject to no sorrow; what pretence or title, I ask, would you have to the reward of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory? What hopes could you entertain of the prize of your high calling, if you had exercised no vigour or patience in running the race that is set before you? And not only so, but perhaps you would have had neither capacity, nor qualification for the joys and happiness of heaven, without having undergone some preparatory discipline, while an inhabitant upon earth. From grandeur, ease and fortune, from fulness and luxury, perhaps the transition would not have been easy, or practicable, to the joys of a spiritual being, in the kingdom of your Father which is in heaven. Or could you with any decency, propriety or justice, expect a kingdom of God in heaven, as the consequence

and reward of a life of pleasure, and enjoyment upon earth? Must religion be all reward, and every instance of duty receive its recompence in hand? a full recompence here, and an eternal recompence hereafter? For what? For doing nothing and suffering nothing that is painful to sense, or disagreeable to our notions of happiness, and our fond expectations of the benignity of Providence.

INDEED this demand and objection in favour of the good and the religious, is such as no good man would, or could consistent with his character, make in his own behalf; for how absurd and impious would be a prayer against poverty and pain, against calumny and shame, against sickness and suffering of all kinds; that is, a prayer for ease and plenty, for fortunes and honours, preferred by a disciple of the meek and humble, the poor, the persecuted and crucified Jesus; of so different a spirit and opinion have been some great and good

good men of the christian church, that they have entertained doubts of the favour and blessing of God, and of their own salvation, because of their prosperity, and because they have not been visited like the "Captain of their salvation, who was made perfect through sufferings." The man indeed, whose treasure and conversation is in heaven, and whose hope is full of immortality, will have little concern or anxiety for the interests of that life, which passeth away as a shadow, and whose extent in comparison of the days of eternity, is but as a handbreadth.

THUS by taking away the distresses of mankind, you would take away the trial, and thereby the exercise and the very existence of virtue ; and by exacting for it a present and equal reward would destroy all reasonable hopes of its future recompence : I will add that by such an administration, you would banish the best part of religion, and render more disputable the equity and goodness

ness of that Providence, for whose vindication you would seem to be concerned. Faith, hope, and the love of God are justly reckoned among the principal graces of the christian life; and the more remote and distant the objects of these graces are, the more meritorious, if I may use the expression, is the exercise of them; on this occasion we believe God on his word, we accept his promises, and pay a willing and sincere obedience, notwithstanding all untoward appearances and perplexing discouragements thrown in the way of our duty. But let a present and instant reward be uniformly assigned to every instance of duty; let the humble be immediately exalted; let the charitable and beneficent be crowned with riches and honours, and the patient and submissive transported to ease and pleasure; every man in his senses would immediately commence religious, not for God's sake, but his own: godliness would be but another name for gain; we should pray and preach, as other men traffic; for the

the greater returns our devotion brought us ; we should be as one of the multitudes which followed Christ for the sake of the loaves and the fishes, and not to hear “ the gracious “ words which proceeded out of his mouth.” The service of God would be no other than the service of Mammon ; and the most avaricious and aspiring would probably be the most devout : let mines of gold open, or let showers of gold descend, or let full tides of pleasure flow in ; let honours and titles distinguish my name and family, would be the real sense of the prayers of such devotees. The pure love of God and his perfections, faith in his promises, and hopes of immortal bliss, would be in a great measure extinguished, or, in the eyes of ordinary and superficial observers, confounded with mercenary views and worldly attachments ; nay, God himself might seem by the gratification of the baser passions, to encourage and enflame them, and to have no other, nor better blessings to bestow. The holiness, the purity, the moral and spiritual

perfections of God would be hereby called in question, and his servants unseasonably, improperly, and perhaps in vain called upon to set their affections on things above, on things eternal that are not seen, while they are full and abounding in every earthly blessing.

WHERE in such a scheme of things would be the patient endurance of the saints, that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and that love of the Father, which overcometh, and is inconsistent with the love of the world?

SURELY the greatest, the most generous and heroic is the piety of such, whose conduct is influenced by such maxims as these:
“let me rather suffer affliction with the
“people of God, than enjoy the pleasures
“of sin for a season: I will keep me still
“by God, though he may seem to forsake me: I will believe though I see him
“not

“not : I will obey though I hear him not:
 “though he slay me, yet will I trust in
 “him, and vindicate his Providence at the
 “hazard of my being.”

HERE is a fight well pleasing to God ! A frail mortal beset with temptations, yet resisting them ; laden with calamities, yet patiently bearing them : opposed by the keenest enemies, yet still persevering in his christian course ; and though threatned with the wreck of earth and heaven, yet still faithful, erect, and undaunted, strong and triumphant through the power of his principles, and by the mighty power of God !

By such examples, the divine original and heavenly influence of religion is demonstrated ; and we are naturally, and I had almost said necessarily led to acknowledge,
 “surely these men are the excellent of the
 “earth: these are none other than the Sons
 “of

“ of God.” Whereas by a different scheme of things, wherein an easy virtue, or a virtuous ease would be the prevailing principle, religion would be deprived of its first honours, the sufferings of its martyrs.

To this must be added, that the Providence of God, and its evidences would be no less affected by such regular allotments to virtue, as are implied in, and required by this objection.

FOR let the righteous in no instance suffer, but let a suitable and equal reward immediately attend on every virtuous act; such a regular succession and connexion, constantly repeated, and universally taking place, would be ascribed, and not without reason, to a natural order originally established in the first formation of things; from which time God would be excluded from all his works, and all his future interpositions be considered not necessary in the affairs of mankind. The general order and
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succession of the seasons in the natural, and the general effects of the passions in the moral world, have led some both of the ancients and moderns to embrace the opinion of a fate irrefragable, and a necessity inviolable in the course of human affairs; but was this general order, or were these general effects universal, and without those exceptions which we now observe both in the natural and moral world, then philosophers would have much better grounds for their opinion, and seeing no changes, they would the more strongly be induced to fear no God: moral fitnesses, effects and causes, would be considered as no other than natural properties; and the passions, good or bad, be ascribed, like the winds and weather, to a pre-ordained, pre-determined and necessary course of things; where in such a constitution would appear those signal interpositions of a moral government and a righteous Governor, which make the most valuable part, though they have been least observed upon, in the history of the world?

world? How could God be said to “arise
 “in judgment to help all the meek upon the
 “earth,” if the meek wanted not his help?
 how could he display his goodness, if we
 had no wants? How could he support us
 by his strength, if we had no weaknesses?
 How could he comfort us under no sorrows,
 or deliver his servants from no dangers?
 In such an administration no man would
 think himself obliged, as having no rea-
 sonable motive, to address God by prayer
 and praise; as devotion would be unneces-
 sary and impertinent, so it would be in
 vain; for why address a God, who was
 absent and regarded not, and who had de-
 puted necessity, fate, or nature with the
 exercise of his power, and the administra-
 tion of his government? The poet’s lan-
 guage might then be adopted into philoso-
 phy as well as theology, and “a better na-
 ture”* be allowed to supplant the Maker of
 the world.

THE virtuous and pious, thus not deli-

* Melior Natura. Ovid.

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vered, but prevented from suffering, and anticipated in their wants and wishes, would have a less sense of pious gratitude, and want that best comfort of a good man's heart in partaking the blessings of God, the sweet and happy reflection that they are God's blessings. Self-complacency and self-love would take place of the love of God; and we should naturally ascribe all our blessings and enjoyments to our own merits and virtues, and not to the goodness and mercy of God. We should sacrifice, if we sacrificed at all, to our own drag, and our own net, and erect ourselves into a kind of Godhead, as if by our moral conduct we were the disposers of our own fate and fortunes.

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DISCOURSE XIII.

JUDGES vi. 12. 13.

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.

LET us once more resume the cause of God, and attempt to vindicate his Providence, in answer to the popular objection

tion raised against it, from the sufferings of the virtuous.

TRUE goodness, it seems according to this objection, should be the measure of good fortune, and the truly pious and virtuous alone exempted from any share of distress and calamity. Be it so: and let the Providence of God distribute according to your direction. Here then we have one set of men, who do their alms, and prefer their prayers in secret, who conscious of their sincerity, are less careful of the ostentation of their virtue, desire mainly to approve themselves to God, and are little concerned for the approbation and applause of men. These men, I dare pronounce, are, as you should seem to require them, generally happy: and if prudence goes along with their piety, generally prosperous.

AGAIN, you have another set of men, who call themselves, and are called by you
religious,

religious, but are in fact flaming zealots and uncharitable bigots, who contend for the shadow more than the substance; for the body more than the soul and spirit of religion; for rites and ceremonies, or against rites and ceremonies, more than for justice, mercy and truth, and move heaven and earth in defence of the colour of a feather or the weight of a hair. Now God, who according to our best conceptions of him, requiring "to be worshipped in spirit and in truth," who hath declared, "he will have mercy and not sacrifice," and charity before all other graces, must according to the rule of an exact distribution of justice, leave these men at least to the consequences of their false zeal, their groundless and unhappy prejudices, their ill faith and ill manners; they must, if justly dealt with, be greatly unhappy; and your good man, in the sense of his party, and perhaps in his own sense, will call and exclaim in the words of Gideon, "If the Lord is with us, why then is all this befallen us?"

WHAT I mean by these, and many more examples of the same kind, which might be produced, is this; that supposing an exact present allotment of reward and punishment to the righteous and to the wicked, you would still have room to object to the equity and goodness of the providential administration; as God must proportion his allotment to the disposition of the heart and reins, and a variety of circumstances, which render an action more or less virtuous or criminal; but which are all unknown to you, who must frequently judge by appearances, and can go no further than the outward act in your knowledge of the morality of the action. The same reward must sometimes be assigned to two actors, who perhaps appeared to you of very different characters; or a different punishment inflicted on criminals, whose guilt you might imagine to be the same: ignorance, prejudice and passion warping your judgment, could not at all affect the pure eye of God.

BUT

BUT after all, you will, as you may insist, that there are and have been many examples of indisputable, unaffected and real goodness, exposed to distress and misery: we allow there have, and insist there must be, unless you would destroy the use of liberty, the exercise, the trial, and the very existence of virtue and religion, with their hopes of immortality, from among mankind, and at the same time render more disputable the moral attributes, and the present providential interpositions of God.

THERE is an instance of suffering virtue, which may distress a serious inquirer on this subject. It is that of the Roman people, in the later periods of their empire; and while subject, for a succession of ages, to the caprice, the tyranny, and wanton cruelty of their Cæsars. Men, or rather monsters, who were a disgrace to human nature, and with equal insolence and impiety, trampled upon the laws both of God and man. Nor were they the base, the

venal, and corrupt only, who were sacrificed; but the best blood of Rome, the blood of patriarchs and philosophers, of the brave, the honest, the wise and good, was wantonly shed at the nod of these imperial assassins. It was a crime to be virtuous; it was a crime to be innocent.

To this it might perhaps be replied, that the men who bore with such tyrants, might seem to deserve them; and that the patriot and the hero, who could patiently see the sword of the tyrant fall upon the neck of others, might seem to call it down in justice upon his own: that the wise and good, as they are called, seem to fall less pitied, as conniving at and submitting to the reign of folly and vice: that Rome at this time seems to have been sunk into such a lethargy and insensibility of virtue, liberty, and antient manners, that nothing but the sword of such tyrants, could seem capable of preserving alive the sense and memory of their former happiness: that if the best men were
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the sufferers, they might seem the most justly entitled to this distinction; as from them more peculiarly might have been expected a protection of the lives, and a vindication of the liberties of their countrymen and fellow-citizens: and that notwithstanding the indolence and insensibility of both Senate and people to their rights and interests, their liberties and lives; yet Providence frequently interposed in their vindication, and in its own, and turned over successive tyrants, after a life of cowardice, disorder and distraction, of madness, turbulence and guilty terror, to the sword of the executioner; and doomed them to share the same fate they had made others suffer.

BUT perhaps it might be more modest to reply, that the subject is too extensive, and lies too remote from our present notice and observation: that the all-wise and infinite God is not answerable to his frail creatures for every act of his Providence, in every period of the history of man: that a

variety of circumstances might be peculiar to the several sufferers, which might justify their suffering in the sight of a righteous and holy God : and that it is sufficient he has left one great moral lesson, an incontestible proof of his moral attributes and government in the tremendous fall of this once mighty state, viz. That the loss of virtue is, as it always will be, attended with the loss of liberty, property, security and happiness to the individuals, and to the general body of a society : that Heaven expects our own efforts in cultivating and preserving the blessings it bestows : that as we must contribute to, or co-operate with Heaven, in producing, or preserving our greatest blessings ; so the greatest misery we are subject to, is that to which ourselves are accessory : that Heaven is most wanting to us, when we are wanting to ourselves : and that tyranny and tyrants, the worst of evils, as they are here objected, are of men's own, not of God's creating ; but permitted, like diseases in the natural body, the effects of irre-

irregularity and intemperance, to make the patients sensible of their misconduct, and thereby to recall and recover them to the state from whence they are fallen: that imperial greatness can give no sanction to guilt, or security from the vengeance of Heaven: and that its effects, fatal to the righteous as well as to the wicked, are permitted to arm all mankind against it. When God makes use of these tyrants as his instruments to punish the guilty, we cannot justly complain on their account: and if his justice is called in question on account of innocent sufferers, this censure will lose much of its force, by considering the many thousands and ten thousands of both the righteous and the wicked, who lived under the divine protection, secure from the rage of these execrable tyrants: for if the sufferings of the innocent, inflicted by the hand of tyrants, must be laid to the charge of a Divine Providence, the protection of numberless multitudes of both innocent and

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guilty, must certainly heighten our sense of the mercy of Providence.

It will at least be allowed a justifiable proceeding, and necessary to preserve the virtue and happiness of mankind, that national calamity should be the consequence of national corruption. No nation had perhaps been more eminently favoured than the Roman, during the *Æras* of their virtue and liberty. What room then for complaint, that being sunk into vice and slavery, they were no longer the favourites of a righteous Providence? Their distinguished misery was a moral lesson held out to all the nations of the earth, and one of the loudest calls to religion and virtue.

VICE punished and virtue rewarded would speak a regular state, but vice triumphant and suffering virtue indicate an irregularity and disorder, which should be the strongest incitement to a reformation; if you say that vice and virtue thus circum-

stanced,

stanced, are proofs of an irregular and unrighteous Providence, you mistake the plan of Providence in the present state, which is not intended for the final and full reward, but for the exercise and trial of virtue; and this could have no place, at least not so signal a stage without suffering: to do evil and suffer for it, is certainly no virtue: but to do righteously and suffer for it with patience and contentment, this certainly must be acceptable, and the best sacrifice we can offer to the moral Governor of the world, and which none but a moral Governor would require and accept.

WHEN we behold Rome in her meridian of glory, and extent of empire, we forget the throes she felt at her birth, and the labour she underwent in her infant and growing state: we speculate not thus rationally on the present occasion; but the Eternal, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, sees past, present and to come in one view, and as I may say at a glance; he
confines

confines not his prospect, as the objector does on the present question, to its suffering, or what I would call its nascent state, but sees it grown up, and in its full maturity, in its triumph, and in its glory; and thus justified to Himself, and vindicated in his all-perfect attributes, upon the full view and comprehension of the history of man in the whole extent of his existence, leaves short-sighted mortals to their own objections and ignorance; and thus these objections themselves have their use, and are left as a test or trial of our faith and obedience; which are the more eminent, and approve themselves the more, in proportion to the difficulties they have to conquer, and the opposition they meet with from unfriendly appearances in the course of nature or Providence. Was virtue in every instance, and instantly happy, here would be another demonstration in its favour, or rather a natural necessity, not a moral obligation to it; seeing and believing would be the same thing: we should embrace truth as a delight,

light, and pursue virtue as a pleasure; virtue and truth would attract the mind in the same manner, as the light and heat of the sun affect the body. The moral scheme of things, which now is declarative of the moral attributes, must be displaced and over-ruled by a mechanical system, a steady and inflexible necessity and fate. The most generous virtues and heroic graces, faith and hope, fortitude, patience and resignation, must be withdrawn from the system of moral and christian duties. The wicked must be restrained from doing, and the virtuous from suffering ill. Persecutor and tyrant, patriot and martyr, would be characters unknown in the world; and the one rendered miserable, and the other happy for no overt acts or visible effects of these virtues and vices: a process which must utterly confound us in our speculations on the righteous ways of Providence. In this case the happiness and misery of different men would be considered as no other

other than the several natural propensities of natural or animal beings.

To answer the objection before us to the satisfaction of the objectors; tyrants must have been punished as such, though guiltless of any act of tyranny, that affected or distressed the virtuous: and these in their turns must have been rewarded for the apparent exertion of no virtue in opposition to tyranny and the tyrants. The tyrant must have perished in all the seeming innocence, and perhaps with the reputation of the patriot; and the patriot must have survived in all the torpid ease and security of the tyrant. Rome must have fallen in consequence of her loss of liberty and virtue, and yet the effects of this loss must have been without prejudice to the virtuous and the free. Antony must proscribe, and Nero and Caracalla murder none but such who deserve to die. Cato must be secure and free amidst the common slavery: or, if he engages,
must

must hazard nothing, and be assured of victory in defence of the common liberty.

ROME in its fall, yet remains a terror to the nations, and an awful example of the fatal effects of vice and immorality; but had these effects been less fatal, extending only to the vicious, while the virtuous remained in security, liberty, and peace, the terror had been less alarming, and the example less awakening: the virtuous, contented and satisfied with their own possessions, had probably grown careless of the public happiness and common liberty, and in divesting themselves of all human and social affections, pleaded the direction of God himself, and the course and order of his Providence: and thus in rewarding, you would destroy the most distinguished virtue: for who would think himself concerned in opposing the tyrant, from whom he was secure to suffer nothing? Or, might he not think it impious to oppose him, when his sword never fell but on the guilty head?

head? The respectable names of hero, patriot, and martyr, must cease from among mankind, when country, liberty and religion promised nothing but instant and inviolable happiness, and required nothing hazardous or painful to be undergone in their support and vindication.

CAN we conceive it requisite in the character of a moral Governor of the world, that he should ordain a happiness independent of virtue; or to connect virtue and happiness so inseparably and intimately, as not to be distinguished by beholders in the process? Or, has he no equal and proper reward for moral good, but what is natural? And must the best and most heroic souls be unsatisfied without the pleasures of sense and fancy? And the promoters of sincere truth and holy religion be undone without their share of riches, pleasures and honours? Are faith and virtue no more than names, except they are crowned with present enjoyments? Is the love of God only the

the love of self? Would the good man require those riches and titles, that ease and pleasure, which he would be ashamed to make the subject of his devotion? Or, can heaven reward and distinguish its best servants only by such blessings, as are frequently common to the worst and basest of mankind? Must the Infinite and Eternal be confined to your prescript of time and place in the distribution of his blessings? Has God in the present system of nature, and in the common course of things, shewn his approbation and favour of virtue? And will he therefore have no regard to the most ardent exertion, and heroic but unprosperous instances of it? Does God not exist, because not visible? Does he cease to operate, because not sensible; and to regard, because he answers not your present demands? Or is his, or your existence confined to a point? And the most happy and durable reversion not equal to an instant loss or pain? Is a supremely moral Being less so for exacting a moral service from his creatures;

creatures; and making virtue the necessary foundation of their happiness? Or, is a Being supremely good less so, for making present and momentary sufferings to precede, and which must at the same time augment future and eternal enjoyments? And if the most arduous efforts of virtue, are only the necessary and preparatory discipline to a participation of the most exalted bliss, every diminution of our virtue, must in proportion take away from our future gain and glory.

ON this scheme of things, which is the scheme of revelation, the divine attributes, particularly God's holiness and goodness, only shine brighter by the sufferings of virtue, and of the virtuous: and if the best of men are sometimes exposed to the hottest of the battle, it is only to render their victory more conspicuous, and their reward more immense and glorious. What therefore seems the most paradoxical in the discipline and declarations of our Divine Master, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; Blessed are
" they

“they that mourn; Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you, &c.” are no less than “the words of truth and soberness;” the dictates of Divine Wisdom declarative of the rectitude and goodness of the Divine Administration. All suffering is the call to glory: and those whom God chastises and purifies in the furnace of affliction, may be truly said to be the peculiar objects of his love.

—If it be said, that the sufferers under present consideration, the Romans in a state of paganism, had not these principles, these hopes and supports under suffering, it may be granted, though philosophy at this time had received much improvement from the light reflected upon it by christianity; yet the fewer and the weaker were the motives they had to virtue and a virtuous perseverance under distressful circumstances, and temptations to vice and degeneracy, the greater must be their reward from him, who is the same all-present and all-perfect God yesterday, and to day, and for ever. If

men's guilt is aggravated in proportion to the greater light they have resisted in the commission of their crimes; their praise and consequently their reward must be more distinguished, as they have obeyed a fainter light and feebler motives in the prosecution of their duty; and as Pagan Rome was more excusable in its superstition and idolatry, so will its perseverance in truth and virtue be more conspicuous in the sight of heaven, in proportion as it had less benefit of the Divine Light, than that Rome which calls itself Christian.

As God is not confined in his existence and Providence to one short age, or to the limited duration of human life; so is he not the God of one system, of one nation, church, sect or party; and the rational theist will, we suppose, consent and contend with the Apostle, that "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. And thus the moral heathens, though not attaining

DISCOURSE XIII. 355

taining to so perfect a virtue, yet acting upon less perfect and persuasive principles, will certainly “in no wise lose their reward.”

THE tyrants then you object to, as lord-
ing it over and oppressing the innocent, ap-
pear in a rational and religious view of things,
“ministers of God for good” to those whom
they thus oppressed, as giving exercise and
the brightest splendor to their virtues; mak-
ing them spectacles to men and angels; the
admiration of their own, and all future ages;
and offering them up as the most precious
sacrifices to a holy and righteous God.
They might have indulged to ease and the
elegancies of life, and by flattering the pas-
sions, shared in the guilt and favours of the
tyrant. They might by their indolence or
corruption have betrayed the common liber-
ty, and by their licentiousness given counte-
nance to the common degeneracy. Censure
not then the Providence of God, which
permitted them to preserve their virtue at

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the hazard of their being. By such censures we confound heaven and earth, God and the tyrant; and what was perpetrated by the one out of envy, rage and malice, with what was permitted by the other for the honour and compleat happiness of the sufferers. Would you have had those sufferers one and all to have been delivered by miracle from the jaws of the oppressor? Where then would virtue have appeared, thus secure and inviolable from the attack of all its enemies? Where would magnanimity have been displayed in opposing the powerless frowns and harmless attacks of a tyrant, in doing and daring nothing that might endanger the loss of life or fortune?

VIRTUE thus universally secure from suffering, and so it must be to take away all objection, would destroy virtue from among the sons of men; and thus, it seems, for the honour of God, his truth and Providence, the patriarch and the hero, the saint
and

and the martyr, must be characters, which have no place or name upon earth : or in other words ; for the vindication of religion, as it would be thought, the sincerest efforts, and the brightest graces of religion, with the strongest proofs of its divine energy and Almighty sufficiency must cease to manifest themselves in the world.

To conclude this discourse ; if God is a moral Being, as the objection under consideration should seem to require ; and if this world is only a stage of moral trial, intended for the exercise of virtue ; as virtue must have its trial and exercise in order to recommend it to the acceptance and favour of a moral Being ; the distresses to which virtue is at present exposed, constitute its very essence, derive upon it the brightest splendor, and entitle it to its final triumph and reward. Virtue ceasing to do or suffer, ceases to exist : virtue completely rewarded as the objection requires, at present, excludes all title and pretension to the re-

compence of a future state of being. Virtue instantly rewarded, in the act or immediately after, would reduce heroic and persevering faith to the opinion of a natural process or necessary fatalism : and reduce the highest efforts of virtue to the prudence of a good bargain, or the skilful play of a lucrative game. The opinions and hopes of the wisest and best men in the heathen world must be no better than a dream ; and the doctrines and proofs of christianity mere futility and falshood : and if, as these objectors would seem to contend, from the no equal reward to virtue at present, there follows no present Providence, and no future state ; (for the admission of a future state of rewards must entirely remove the objection of the present sufferings of the virtuous ;) the consequence of the objector's opinion in its full force must be this ; that the wisest men in all ages have been deceived, and the best, who have suffered for the cause of virtue, are utterly undone : a consequence, which the objector for his own
fake

fake and for the fake of mankind, if he is a man, and for the honour of God, if he is not an atheist, should avoid and abhor, though the premises that led to it, were much stronger than they are; and we should upon the very principles of reason and human prudence, sacrifice a philosophy productive like this of Epicurus, of immorality and misery, of lifeless virtue and the gloomy horrors of infidelity, to that heroic faith, which animates to virtue, and gives support, peace and comfort in life and in death. If we have not magnanimity enough to act the part, let us not be so mean as to traduce the characters of the suffering patriot and the expiring martyr; and if we have yet the sense to perceive, or a heart to adore and love the all-perfect Being, let us at least not proceed to that absurdity and impiety, to assimilate him to, and make him combine with the bloody murderer and exterminating tyrant.

DISCOURSE XIV.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46.

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body: and so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual.

I CHOOSE not these words from the profound and rapid, the important and elevated

elevated discourse of the Apostle concerning the resurrection of the dead, in order to explain it more at large, or to instruct and confirm you in this capital article of our faith: my design is only from the process of this awful and divine transaction, and from the attributes of God manifested in it, to raise such reflections upon the procedure of Providence, in the government of nature and the administration of human affairs, as may serve to remove doubts and difficulties and answer objections, which some are apt to entertain concerning the righteousness and goodness of God.

IN the words now read to you, as in the course and system of nature we see a difference of excellency and splendor in the objects presented to our observation: "There
" is one glory of the sun, and another glory
" of the moon, and another glory of the
" stars; for one star differeth from another
" star in glory." Again, in the same words you will observe not only a difference in the
degree

degree of excellency, but in the very nature of the objects, and a contrariety or opposition between them : you see corruption opposed to incorruption, dishonour to glory, weakness to power, and a natural or animal, to a spiritual body. Again, we may observe from the words of the Apostle that there is a regular order, and gradual process or progression in the administration of God, from one thing to another, from lesser to greater perfection : “ there is a natural body and there “ is a spiritual body : the first man Adam was “ made a living soul, the last Adam was “ made a quickening spirit : howbeit, that “ was not first which is spiritual, but “ that which is natural, and afterward that “ which is spiritual.”

FROM the divine administration then thus observed upon, and observable in the resurrection of the dead, we may naturally take occasion to shew,

THAT such in reason and propriety ought
to

to be, and such actually is the process and progression, the order, the difference, the contrast or contrariety of things, in the constitution of nature and the procedure of Providence.

I. WE see an amazing difference of things, and various degrees of perfection through the whole system of nature, as far as we can carry our observations: "one star differeth from another star in glory:" thus the objects, both animate and inanimate of this our lower world differ from each other. How great is the distance between the humble shrub and the lofty cedar, between the penurious and narrow brook and the great and wide ocean, between the scarcely discernible signs of life in some minims of the animal orders, and the living soul, erect posture, and reasonable faculties of man? Again, God "that made the world, "and all things therein, hath made of one "blood all the nations of the earth," yet amongst the same race of men, how different is their situation and circumstances, the feature

ture or figure of the body, and the endowments of the mind? The master and the slave, the fool and the philosopher, Therfites and Adonis, Titus and Nero, are of so different a character and disposition that they might seem to be individuals of a different order of beings: high and low, great and little, rich and poor, wise and foolish, light and shade, present themselves to us, in every view in our prospects of nature.

2. THINGS are not only thus distinguished by their different properties and proportions, but they are in their very nature contrasted and opposed to each other: thus in the natural world, we see not only all the variety but all the contrariety possible or conceivable: heat and cold, night and day, winter and summer, bitter and sweet, rest and motion, baneful and salutary, straight and crooked, health and sickness, life and death, hard and soft, vacuity and solidity, fire and water are not more opposite than vice and virtue, wisdom and folly, joy and sorrow,
pain

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pain and pleasure in the moral world: by this contrast and variety in the things made, we are led into a fuller and clearer knowledge of the attributes, particularly of the wisdom, the power and goodness of God: had there been an uniformity observable in all the productions of nature, as for instance, let the productions in the vegetable world have been all reduced to one single kind, and all of this kind have been of the same size, texture, taste and colour: or, let the animal world have furnished out but one kind of creatures, and these all of the same form, feature and complexion; let there be no difference between the climates of the earth, and no distinction of elements and seasons; let eternal summer, or eternal winter have reigned universally, and perpetual day or perpetual night have been the colour of all our time: from such an unvaried sameness of existence, it might have been with some plausibility suggested or suspected, that the Author of nature was an impotent and limited Being, or, that nature had no proper
Author,

Author, at least not such as we deem God to be; but that the whole was the effect of rigid and inviolable fate, necessitated in the process, and without choice, will, or power to vary its productions. In such a scheme of things, our enquiries, like our devotions, must have terminated in nature and necessity: our devotions indeed must have been fruitless, as our enquiries must have been very much confined, and soon at an end in a system so limited; a constant repetition of the same process must soon have reduced all enquiry into a course of well-known experiments.

BUT now we are in the universe not only a number, but a variety of kinds of being, extending as it should seem to all possibility and capacity of existence: for can we conceive of beings or kinds of beings more various, more numerous, or descending lower in the scale of life, than those myriads of the minimis of nature which we discover by the help of glasses, and which we may by analogy presume extend

tend much further, and infinitely beyond the power of our discoveries: hence we are led to conceive of the power, and the goodness of God extending, and as it were pouring out themselves in every possible, every imaginable mode and degree of communication.

By the infinite variety and endless succession of the creatures, notwithstanding the necessary uses, the wantonness, the art and cruelty of man to destroy them; by the various forms and kinds of existence which fill without crowding the universe, by the several species comprehended under the same kind, and by the peculiar marks and characteristics, and by the different powers, forms, features and faculties which distinguish the individuals of the same species: as of man for instance, we see all the energy of Godhead, all conceivable, all possible efficiency exerted in the subjects of the lower creation: let us take for granted, for argument's sake, the existence of God; and
could

could he have given more clear evidences of power and wisdom, of order and design, than are manifested in the present system of nature? Could power have been more various or prolific on so confined a stage? Or, could wisdom have been more evident or accurate on any stage?

BUT the goodness of God is not less conspicuous in this variety and arrangement of things, than his power and wisdom. In the multitude of the objects of creation, man finds a provision made and suited to his various organs, taste, and faculties: in the large range of God's creation he finds both a field for his bodily support, and a subject for his intellectual enquiries and mental gratification; by the subjection and degradation of the lower creatures, to a diminution far beyond our observation and comprehension, we are led to a proper sense of, and proper gratitude for the higher rank we hold in the order of creation; or, by the opposition and contrast of the objects, we are con-

versant with, we are taught to know the use and real value of our blessings.

3. BESIDES this variety, contrast and opposition which we observe in the creatures of God, they have another property not less expressive of his wisdom and goodness, and this is what I call the gradation and progression of things, or that order and method by which they advance in process of time, from less to greater, from worse to better, from their first entity or state to their full growth, maturity and perfection. With pleasing hopes and the fondness for pride and novelty, we find ourselves gradually advancing in stature and wisdom, from childhood to youthful activity and manly vigour: reverse this order and let the man be born in full stature and maturity of wisdom, and thence dwindle down to the inexperience of youth and the inactivity of childhood; should we have had the same relish of our being as in the present order, or an equal sense of the divine wisdom and
benig-

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benignity? Or, let us reverse the state of mankind in general in respect to their religious concerns, as we have done that of the individual: let the first age of the world have commenced with the means and offers of grace, with the hopes, the prospects and promises of glory; from these glorious privileges, let them be reduced to the elements of law, to tradition, to types, and shadows, sacrifice and ceremony, and from thence to the rudeness and barbarism of uninformed and savage nature. Would the divine œconomy have appeared with that beauty and splendor, that harmony and progressive perfection so conformable to our reason, or should we have had such incentives to devotion as we now find upon the review.

LOOKING through the history of past ages, from the early periods of the pastoral and patriarchal life, we see arts and sciences progressively advancing, sometimes indeed buried for a long interval, but reviving with

new splendor: we see philosophy and religion advancing, and though sometimes deformed by superstition and unnatural systems, yet successively reformed and recovering from the dreams of the sophists and the subtilty of schoolmen to their native simplicity and pristine splendor. If we see scepticism and infidelity making frequent attacks upon sacred truth, we congratulate ourselves and the wisdom of God in these attempts, which serve only by new objections to furnish out new proofs of revelation, to magnify its power, increase its honours and advance its triumphs; so that christianity I conceive, though it has been more sincerely practised, was never better understood, or more rationally defended than it has been in these latter days. With respect to the arts and improvements of life, there is I suppose no man who does not look back with pity or contempt on past times compared with his own: and philosophy, we may venture to affirm in the discoveries

discoveries it has made, by experiments and mathematical demonstration, never extended the province of human knowledge so far and wide as within the last century; divine knowledge we have before observed has had the same gradation and order of progression, nature and law, type and shadow, the substance and the archetype, the gospel and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; as many were the prophets sent of heaven of an inferior character before this last Great Prophet came into the world, "full of grace and truth." The gospel gives us the same account of the gradation and order of progression in its subjects "the redeemed of the Lord;" "that was not first" says the Apostle "which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual:" the order of our christian progression, or rather proficiency and progression is from flesh to spirit, from earthly to heavenly principles, from nature to grace, from grace to glory. Thus the kingdom

of God is still advancing, and the evidences of his administration and attributes still opening: thus all things are continually passing away, and all things are become and will no doubt for ever become new. Here a view of the divine administration opens upon us worthy of the infinite perfections of the divinity. Endless orders of creatures still pouring out from the Creator's Hand passing away, and leaving room to new and succeeding generations, rising to light and life and enjoyment unknown before: these generations at several periods are advancing to higher perfection, and admitted to superior advantages in arts and science, and the knowledge of divine truth, which in its origin a small fountain forms itself as it flows into a river, and promises in its progress to become a boundless ocean.

DISCOURSE XV.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 41, &c.

*There is one glory of the sun, and another
glory of the moon, &c.*

FROM these words containing the
process of the resurrection of the body,
and the allusions made use of to illustrate
and confirm it, I took occasion in my last
discourse to attempt a vindication of the

Providence of God, working by the same process, as is here ascribed to the resurrection, and manifested by the same and more numerous instances and allusions from nature.

THESE allusions and instances, though very observable in the whole course of the natural, and I may add of the moral world, and the most striking evidences of the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence are frequently over-looked by a busy and thoughtless world : and therefore I shall the more particularly insist upon them in the present discourse, and then draw proper conclusions from the whole.

I. INDEED the excellency of one thing above another should seem too notorious to be over-looked by the most careless observer. One star doth not differ from another star in glory more, than the other works of God differ from each other in use, dignity and splendor. The difference between the
rational

rational and animal creation, between the wise man and the fool, the beautiful and the deformed, the master and the slave, the subject and the sovereign, with the different productions of the whole natural world, are too evident to be insisted on; while the moral and religious use to be made of this distinction has not been sufficiently attended to.

How admirable is the power of God in thus forming from the same clay “one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” And what a variety of duties in civil and moral life ariseth from the distinction of ranks, orders, and qualities among men: as the fidelity of the subject and the slave, the mercy and humanity of the master and the sovereign, the bounty of the rich, and the service of the poor? The condescension of the learned, and the teachableness and humility of the vulgar; the instructions of the wise, and the attention of the foolish? Above all, how distinguished should be our
piety

piety to that "God, who openeth his hand, "and filleth all things living with plenteousness," or with good in proportion to their several capacities to bear and enjoy it?

2. THE gratitude of man should be in a singular manner inflamed, when he reflects on the goodness of that God, "who hath "given him more understanding than the "beasts of the field, and made him wiser "than the fowls of heaven."

THE contrast, the contrariety and opposition of things throughout the works of nature, are plainly designed to make us more sensible of our blessings by the comparison. All good, or all light equally diffused throughout the whole creation, would have been no light and no good; or at least none so sensible to us, as in the present mixed and contrasted system of nature. Should we have known the value of our daily bread, without appetite and hunger preceding? Should we, or could we have esteemed health

health so great blessing, had we never observed or experienced any interruption of it in ourselves, or others by sickness or distemper? Had we ever hailed the chearful day, or blessed the glorious sun, previously unacquainted with the gloom of night, and the terrors of darkness?

IN short, our rest and peace, our pleasure and happiness, in a great measure if not altogether, depend on preceding labour and fatigue, pain and misery; and the apparent discords compose the whole harmony of human life.

THE curious in arts, and in the survey of nature, the traveller and the historian have observed the propriety and beauty of this contrast in their several subjects, though they have not directed or applied their observations to the moral and religious use we here point out.

THE philosophic Antonine mentions the
lion's

lion's gape, poison, dirt and thorns as appendixes to the more beautiful, important, and useful objects in nature. If, as naturalists observe, the winter lays up all the treasures of the earth in its centre, with no other design but to produce succeeding abundance and a richer harvest, we may add, that the tempests and horrors of that dreary season render us more sensible of the beauty and fostering breezes of the spring. Thus, according to a happy enthusiast,* nature variously attired yields so many fine prospects, that she never gives man leisure to be disgusted with what he possesses.

IN sacred writ, a cloud is generally represented as attending the brightness of God's glory: they illustrate each other, as the opposites in nature. Thus the blackness of the night adds lustre to the moon and stars, and beauty to the day. A picture made up of
of

* Fenelon.

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of light, would, we know, be less illustrious for want of shade; as the day, we have before observed, would be less welcome, did not the night precede; and the sun would shine with diminished splendor, did no cloud ever interpose. Had burning sands, barren heaths and mountains, the rugged rock, the wild forest, and desolate wilderness been expunged from the map of the creation, how could we have known or relished the fruitful plain, or happy vale?

MASTERS in drawing and perspective tell us, that a landscape is set off by a variety of barren spots, and naked rocks. Thus travellers tell us, that Arabia the Happy well deserves that name, not only because most happy in her wealth and produce, but as she is doubly so, when placed in competition with the two Arabias, her deformed and barren neighbours: and Providence, they add, has here made full amends for the deficiencies she has caused in both the other.

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THE critics on composition tell us, that the shining and elevated is not always to be pursued: as shades in a picture shew the luminous parts to more advantage; so the plain and simple in writing recommend and heighten the sublime. Thus the great poet, as he was sometimes called, or Maker of the world has mixed light with darkness, good and evil in his composition; without which mixture we should not be sensible of either.

THE contrarieties or opposites in nature no man can deny, as day and night, heat and cold; nor their expediency, order and beauty: the fact is the same in the moral world, viz. sorrow and joy, peace and war, ignorance and knowledge, reason and passion, &c. all which have no doubt as just a proportion and order, and are as necessary in the moral, as storms and sun-shine, darkness and light, heat and cold are in the natural world.

THAT variety quite through nature, in
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the notes of birds, the colour of flowers, and of day and night, is not more observable than the difference between hunger and thirst, pleasure and pain, and has plainly the same end, viz. to make us sensible of the one by the other. It has been justly observed, that it seems impossible for any man to obtain an adequate notion either of any new pleasure, or any new pain merely by speculation; or rightly to estimate the malignity of an evil, without an experimental sense and feeling of it; or to gain a just value of any good we possess, till we have either known the want of it, or had a taste of the opposite evil. *

WE see not only a pleasing diversity of the creatures in general, but a remarkable difference in point of happiness and misery, of wisdom and folly, in creatures of the same kind. Supposing all the creatures, inhabitants in our system, to bear the shape of
man,

* See Bates of Original Sin, p. 72.

man, where would appear "the human face divine?" Or, let one common intellect inform the various tribes of animals that inhabit the globe, and how would appear "the image of God in man?"

As some, we have observed, are born more ignorant and brutish, to give room for the trial of others virtue in their instruction and reformation; so some suffer injuries and want, are abused and helpless, to try the integrity and charity of others, in their relief and vindication.

As in the civil world, according to the historian,* the prosperity of states is much improved, and more visible by the misery and misfortune of their neighbours: so in private life you see many pining in sickness, afflicted with disease, and exposed to misery and want. Let mankind in general, and the wanton objector against Providence in particular

* Clarendon.

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ticular hence infer, what gratitude they owe to heaven for their own health and abundance.

SOME are born defective in their faculties, or deformed in their persons; if the lame and the blind have place in the creation of God, we cannot ascribe this to the want of power or goodness in the Creator; but these blots, as some may think them, seem plainly intended as foils to set off the beauty of other more perfect and exquisite pieces, and to stand before your eyes, as monitors of his mercy to others: and our piety and gratitude are, or should be hence inflamed by defects and miseries thus averted, or avoided.

WE are sensible of our own high privileges, as reasonable beings, by the brute creation placed below us; higher orders may in like manner have a greater relish of their beings and happiness from observing the imperfections of man: in short, as we see a con-

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traſt running through all nature, to make us ſenſible of the difference and value of our bleſſings, this world itſelf may perhaps be no more than a contraſt to other both preſent and future worlds in the ſyſtem of the univerſe.

THIS procedure of Providence by the contraſt of things being ſo remarkable both in the natural and moral world, it may be expected that we ſhould find ſome mention or traces of it in the will and diſpenſations of God ſupernaturally revealed to mankind: and remarkably to our preſent purpoſe is the obſervation of Eccleſiaſtes or the preacher: “conſider the work of God; “for who can make that ſtraight which “he hath made crooked;” that is, ſeemingly irregular in the natural or civil world. “In the day of proſperity be joyful, but “in the day of adverſity conſider: God “alſo hath ſet the one over againſt the “other, that man ſhould find nothing after him:” that is, as the commentators explain

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explain it, to amend in God's work, or to order things better.

THE son of Sirach is still more explicit on this point: "as the clay is in the pot-
"ter's hand to fashion it at his pleasure;
"so man is in the hand of Him that made
"him, to render to them as liketh him
"best. Good is set against evil, and life
"against death; so is the godly against the
"finner, and the finner against the godly.
"So look upon all the works of the Most
"High, and there are two and two, one
"against another."

WERE we to carry our researches through the Old and New Testament with an eye to the present subject, we should I question not, find numerous passages as full and clear to the purpose as this observation of Solomon; and which would serve to illustrate and confirm it. The contrast of good and evil so visible in the creation gave rise, we know, to an ancient sect among

the Persians, who held two different, and opposite first principles, one the Author of good, the other of evil: in opposition to which God declares by his prophet Isaiah: "I form the light, and create darkness; "I make peace, and create evil: I the "Lord do all these things."

God certainly can never contradict himself; and divine wisdom will act uniformly, that is, with the same propriety and fitness through all its works: and though we may not find the same measure of good communicated uniformly to all ages and nations, we may possibly find an uniform procedure in Providence, and a sameness in the process and method of communication. God's harsher dispensations to his own people, and to some of his chosen servants, served only to render them more sensible of succeeding mercies. After the great and strong wind rending the mountains, and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; after the earth-quake and the fire, the still small voice of

of God would be more attended to by the prophet. How weak and inconsiderable upon the comparison had been Joseph's sense and pious gratitude for his exaltation and all his glory in Egypt, had he been born to royalty, and never experienced distress, slavery and imprisonment. After the experience of a desert land, and the wasteful howling wilderness, it must give a more singular pleasure to Israel, "to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and to drink the pure blood of the grape." I scarce need point out to you with what peculiar propriety were contrasted the divine conductors of Israel through the wilderness, the cloud of the Lord more distinguished by the day, and the pillar of fire more conspicuous by night. God's appearance is sometimes described or his exhibitions of himself, as in or from a pillar of fire and of the cloud;

the two different elements serving the more to illustrate each other. Thus on the descent of the divinity on mount Sinai, the thunders and lightnings were attended with a thick cloud.

BUT perhaps the most striking contrast God ever exhibited to this lower world, or however, the most important and interesting is that, which appears between the types, the shadows and terrors of the law, and that "grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ:" we should have been little sensible of the last, had we been altogether unacquainted with the former.

LET truth break like light from God all-knowing and the centre of knowledge, in common proportion to all his creatures from the foundation of the world; or let falsehood have no existence in fact or in idea; we should not have known the disadvantage of this; nor the benefit of that: as were gold the universal metal, and common as
dust

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dust or stone, it would lose much of its value and lustre.

A VIEW of falshood is often the best way to display truth, as darkness recommends light. Thus false philosophy recommends the true, and the forged systems of religion, such as the Heathen and Mahometan, are shades to set off to more advantage the light of God's revelation.

IN the history and progress of religion we read of false Prophets, false Apostles, and even false Christs, that man's faith and ingenuity might be tried, and his gratitude excited, in distinguishing and acknowledging the true. Nay, the very extravagancies of the sceptic, and melancholy tendency of the gloomy genius of infidelity, give us a higher relish for God's truth and light.

THE general view which revelation exhibits us of human nature, and of God's spiritual dispensations to mankind, is founded in the

contrast here insisted upon, and observable through all his works. We are wounded, that he may heal us; sinful that he may cleanse and forgive us, blind that he may enlighten us, and at present confined to earth, that we may have the truer relish of heaven. This would have been less so to those who had never made their abode upon earth. As virtue, piety, and grace are the qualifications, so the world may be a scene fitted to prepare us for, and give us the truer relish of the enjoyment of heaven. Without being men, we might not be happy, at least so sensible of our happiness, when advanced to the order and society of angels.

To one long confined by sickness or imprisonment, and now enlarged, every thing wears a gayer dress, the breeze breathes a new perfume, nature appears in fairer colours, and a lovelier hue, while the sun shines forth with more distinguished lustre. Thus from the prison of the body, from the dishonours of the grave, and the rottenness of
corruption

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corruption, how glorious will be the transition, and how illustrious the contrast of a body incorruptible and a life everlasting?

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DISCOURSE XVI.

CORINTHIANS XV. 41, &c.

*There is one glory of the sun, and another
glory of the moon, &c.*

IN two former discourses on these words,
we have shewn at large the order and
method of the Divine Administration in the
natural and moral world.

CONTENT

CONTENT we then ourselves with the present portion of good, in knowledge or enjoyment, which God shall vouchsafe to bestow; and let us proceed to add what was principally intended by this discourse, that is, the application of it, in vindication of his attributes and the administration of his Providence in the present system of nature, and dispensation of grace.

FROM the view of things just now taken it appears, that what is frequently considered, and objected as an evil, is not absolutely such; but only a pre-requisite or necessary preparative to our taste and relish of some future and superior good. Meanness and misery cease to be the subject of complaint, when we connect them with the exaltation and happiness, which they are fitted and intended to produce. Disease and darkness, even death itself may be supported with courage and comfort, when considered as the harbingers of health and light, of life and immortality. The horrors of a prison
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are not only tolerable but eligible, when they serve only to make us more sensible of the blessings of liberty, of the light and breath of heaven. Poverty and pain are your present lot? Can you think them a grievous burden, or rather are they not your happy portion, when they lead to the riches of God, and the pleasures at his right hand for evermore? What is heaviness for a night, when it only recommends and endears the more the joy that cometh in the morning?

IN the physical world, you object as evil, storms and tempests, and the horrors of winter; but you will cease to object and complain, when you remember that without these horrors and storms, you would have no subject for pleasure and gratitude, from the beauties of blooming nature, from fruitful seasons and plentiful harvests: nay, an occasional interruption in these is not less necessary to make you sensible of your dependence on the Almighty Father and Governor

vernor of heaven and earth, and of his mercy in the regular course of those blessings and benefits, which he is daily and annually pouring upon you.

IN the moral or civil world, you observe convulsions of state and revolutions of empire: but without these perhaps the world would be a stranger to the order, peace and policy of a well regulated society, and of the virtues necessary to support them. In the religious world, superstition and idolatry, wanton and cruel rites, absurd and unmeaning ceremonies have prevailed; this serves only to illustrate the simplicity and purity of God's truth, and the benevolent temper and spiritual tendency of his own dispensations. If ignorance for a time covered the nations of the earth, we may consider that without this preceding darkness, we had not been sensible of, or sufficiently attentive to the benefit and lustre of the light and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Had not the juvenile, and as I
may

may say, the infant elements of the law gone before, we had not acknowledged the dignity, the importance and happiness of the perfect man in Christ Jesus: as without the antecedent and preparatory assistance of grace we had never been meet partakers with the Saints in light. Without the experience of the misery of the present life, we should have less relish of the blessings of the future. For suppose us completely happy in our abode upon earth, what addition of happiness could we be sensible of in our translation to heaven? Nay the very trifles, the follies and vices, which have place in the human drama, are not without their use; as they give us to know and taste the importance, the weight and consequence of sincere virtue, divine wisdom and immortal truth. The seeming deformity and dissonance of life form the harmony and beauty of life: and evil, or what is called such, is frequently the foundation and immediate cause in nature of our greatest good; and what we call a blot grows a beauty in the
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the process and scheme of the Divine Government.

OUR objections against Providence are grounded in ignorance, partiality and short-sightedness: we observe upon the parts, without taking in the whole system to which they belong: we remark and take offence at the dark side of human nature and human life, without considering the fair and luminous parts, which the shade was intended to illustrate. We object to the type, because not contrasted and compared with the antitype; and censure the prophecy, because we extend it not to the completion: we dwell on the present moment, act, or accident, without sending our thoughts forwards to the consequence and conclusion to which they lead. *

God

* This is to take one act, or one scene of a dramatic performance, and from thence, without regarding the connection of the piece, to judge of the genius of the author.

GOD gives not, neither is he obliged to give, an account of his dispensations to us : we are indeed not capable of comprehending them. He pervades infinity : he sees through eternity ; and it is enough that the scheme of things upon the whole, the system of the universe in its parts, progression and consummation, answers the idea of Him who is infinitely perfect. He sees not the child alone struggling with cries and tears, but in the child the advancing and full-grown man, enjoying the perfect blessings of his nature, and discharging the proper offices of life.

NOR does our God view man alone, as man often views himself, as a child of misery, and an inhabitant of a vale of tears, but as one who has passed through the red sea, and finished his journey through the wilderness, and is arrived at the land of promise, the heavenly Canaan ; a saint in bliss, and an heir of glory. Thus we perhaps in reviewing the elements of the world, and the

ages of ignorance and barbarism, which have prevailed, and yet in part prevail among the inhabitants of the earth, may be shocked or perplexed with the procedure of the Divine Providence. But this government is not a scheme confined to time or place ; to earlier or later, to nearer or more remote ; but like the essence and attributes of its Author pervading, connecting and comprehending the universe of being. The Infinite and Eternal should seem to require a stage suited to his nature ; that is, space extending to infinity, and time lengthened out into eternity, in which to act his part, and display his powers and perfections. A space of boundless extent and endless duration is alone ample enough to give room for every possibility of essence and existence in its proper time and place ; for we cannot conceive of infinite perfection as spending itself in one breath ; or exhausted in one essay ; or confined to one system, or limited to one period : we may rather suppose it operating in every instant of time

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to produce every possible degree of good ; and by every means consistent with rectitude and order, maturing and progressively advancing the good produced to a higher stage and greater perfection ; thus in the divine display and intention, and in the view of sovereign wisdom and goodness, every thing is regular, right and good. Thus while we see partially, and therefore imperfectly the single and unconnected, or perhaps the first and lowest links of the extended and universal chain of being ; the subject of divine government ; God sees the whole, and every part in their origin, their connection, their progression and consummation : hence arise our mistakes in judging of the ways of Providence ; and hence we frequently censure as a blemish, what is a beauty ; we consider as an end, what is only a beginning, and that as an effect, which is only a cause, or connecting principle : we lament as a cross, what God intends for a crown : we repine at pain, which God would make the foundation of our

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pleasure ;

pleasure; we call that a disease, which God designs for a cure; and while we are convulsed with the agonies of death, God regards only the throes of our immortal birth. You lament the suffering martyr, while God sees only the triumphant saint; you are shocked with a bed of flames, which God regards only as a robe of glory.

God sees (and it is enough that he vindicates himself to himself) in one view contraries and opposites in nature, causes and their effects, the origin and consummation of things; all that we call above, around, or below, light and darkness, pleasure and pain, the past and future, life and death, time and eternity, heaven and earth moving in perfect harmony with his divine perfections; and all operating by the justest measures and proportion to produce all the good of various kinds capable of being produced. He sees not the several parts of nature, or the different kinds of creatures, or the individuals

viduals of the same kind ; as of man for instance, or the different age, circumstances and fortune of the same individual, as distinct, disjointed, and independent things ; but as connected, and jointly and separately pushing forwards a system of the universe, fruitful of all possible good, and answering to the idea of supreme goodness, and infinite perfection. We therefore vainly and absurdly object to a part, undiscerning as we are of its connection with the whole ; and as vainly censure the accidents of time, not considering their reference to eternity. It is not from the colour, or shade of your present fortune that you are to judge of the equity and goodness of the divine Providence : they may possibly be but the preceding night or dawn of your future day, and designed only to set off its beauty and splendor.

You lament the feebleness and misery, the cries and tears of infant innocence ; but you would cease your pity and concern,

did you see, as God sees, from these momentary pangs of infant nature, arise the perfect stature and fulness of the man in Christ Jesus, the child of God and an heir of glory.

TAKE the night from the day and the winter from the summer: separate the child from the man, and the seed-time from the harvest, and how partially and unequally must you then judge of the ways and administration of God? Not more ingenuous or equal is your conduct, when you take the natural without the spiritual body, and divide corruption from incorruption: when you lament the miseries of life, abstracted from the consideration of immortality; and mourn over the dishonours of the grave, unconnected with the glory of the resurrection.

AGAIN we are guilty of equal partiality and ingratitude, when standing, as we do on the advantage-ground, we form a judgment of the proceedings and attributes of God

God from a retrospect on the rudiments and imperfection of the law that is done away, or from our present prospects of rude and primeval nature, without extending and carrying our views forward to the means of grace and the hopes of glory.

THE volume of the universe is perfect as its author, and without doubt contains mines of truth for ever opening, fountains of good for ever flowing, and an endless succession of still brighter and happier exhibitions of the great and glorious God-head, answering to the nature and idea of infinite fulness and perfection. Such we conceive is the volume of the universe, of which and of its Author we presume to judge with equal folly and rashness, as from a single page or perhaps one line of a page, or one single word of a line in the first opening of the volume.

IT is not conceiveable that infinite perfection should spend itself at once and for

ever; or in other words, that infinite wisdom should employ all its expedients, supreme goodness be exhausted, the Almighty power spent and wearied, and the eternal God-head exert the whole divinity in one act and instant. A space boundless and time immeasurable could only give room for the display of infinite perfections. Hence we presume and agree with our blessed Saviour, "that the Father worketh hitherto," and will for ever work; ever be exerting without possibility of exhausting his boundless perfections, and ever throwing off new forms, and new modes of existence, characteristic of his attributes and expressive of his eternal power and God-head. But a sameness of operation would not be thus expressive and characteristic; and an uniformity of productions, as for instance, one order only of creatures fitted with the same organs and faculties; and one truth, one faith, and one hope assigned with the same clearness and precision to all its inhabitants from the foundation of the world, would have argued

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ed limited goodness, wisdom and power; perfections now much more manifest in the different and various degrees of good imparted; by one truth introducing and supporting another, by light succeeding light, by new grace and truth; by new miracles of mercy, by extraordinary means of grace, and with succeeding brighter hopes of glory.

SUCH we should expect from infinite perfection, and such we find actually to be the system of this world, presenting to us, to make us more sensible of it, a varied and progressive good: a good varied almost to infinity and progressive to eternity: such a good as is alone fitted to give room for the display of perfections infinite and eternal. It is then the highest presumption for man in his present situation, from the view of a part only, to judge of the whole of God's government and kingdom; and from present momentary effects to censure the Almighty and eternal cause. Pious gratitude, admiration

ration and holy joy much better become us for the blessings we enjoy, compared with the evils to which we are liable; and for the high station we hold in the creation of God, compared with the lower orders of creatures descending in the scale of life and intelligence to a degree almost infinitely below us.

AT the same time contentment in our present state and circumstances, and faith and hope in our advancement to higher degrees of happiness and glory naturally arise from our consideration of the divine attributes, and from the progression we observe in the administration and government of God. "Ye were sometimes darkness," says the Apostle, "but now are ye light in the Lord:" and let it be our comfort that they who are now sons of light, will hereafter be the sons of glory. "It does not yet appear," says another Apostle, "what we shall be:" but we may collect from the promises of God, bearing in this a perfect analogy with his progressive

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gressive beneficence in the government and history of the world, that our future state of glory will as much exceed the dispensation of grace, as the dispensation of grace exceeds the attainments of rude and untutored nature. Let your present condition be what it may, remembering that it is but the part of a whole, and a single act in the drama of your existence, you may wait with joy and patience the events of your future history, conducted by the hand of an all-wise, all-gracious and Almighty Creator: what though your way be dark and slippery, you will persevere with joy and confidence, if you consider it, agreeable to the analogy observable in the present system of nature, as only a contrast and progression to your future security, light and glory: you will not complain that your present day is short and gloomy, if you consider it as a prelude to the bright and endless days of eternity: you will not be staggered with unfriendly appearances in a corner of this globe, when you consider the whole earth as no more than

than a minute wheel, subservient to the revolutions, the progression and perfection of the universe of God: nor will you be discouraged, or despond through an imagination, or suspicion that you may be overlooked in the immensity of God's works. To him a part is as apparent as the whole, and equally attended to; as the perfection of the whole depends on the conduct and regularity of the parts: and we may observe in the very minims of nature, and in their parts and proportions the divine attributes as manifest, as in the fabric of the world. Nor is the brightest angel more perfect in his kind, than the fowls of the air, or the beasts of the field; nor more amply or suitably provided for, in proportion to their several affections or capacities: the present disposition of nature in its light and shade, in its heights and depths, in the contrast and connection of the parts, and in the progression and advancing perfection of the whole, demonstrates the Divine Administration as actual and as present, as the
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brighter regions of angels, principalities and powers: nor let a complaint be heard, or a murmur expressed at our present situation, compared with that of higher orders of the saints and sons of God; since high as they now shine in splendor, and at nearer distance to the throne of God, they were once perhaps inhabitants of this vale of tears and misery; and low as you may now imagine yourself, encircled with clouds and darkness, you are daily advancing in the way they have gone before you, to the happiness they are possessed of, and the glories they have attained. No condition can be judged low, nor any circumstances unhappy, which constitute the basis of your future felicity, and promote your exaltation to immortal bliss.

TOWERING as the spirit, and vast as the imagination of man is, they may indulge to wantonness and satiety in the prospect of the plains of immensity, and of the ages of eternity, spread out for their reception,
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their progression, and advancement in truth and happiness: and circumscribed as our present faculties are, confined to a body liable to frailty, mortality and corruption, when we consider the promises of retribution, and the words of the Apostle in the text, in perfect agreement with the order observable in the process of nature, we may entertain abundant comfort and boundless hopes, even from our meanness and misery, our mortality and corruption, contrasted and “ compared “ with the glory that shall be revealed in us:” for thus the Apostle speaks of our present frail and mortal body. “ It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it “ is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in “ power: it is sown a natural body, it is “ raised a spiritual body: and as we have “ borne the image of the earthy, we shall “ also bear the image of the heavenly.” Here is a contrast; and here a gradation commences, that surpasses, throws into obscurity the preceding dispensations of God

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to man. And here we may most properly apply what the Apostle has said of the gospel of grace, to the kingdom of glory: "Old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." Here is God's kingdom come in a fuller and more complete sense, than was manifested by the first Advent of the Messiah. Here we shall see, not as at present "through a glass darkly, but face to face." New subjects of adoration and praise, of joy and triumph must arise from new displays of truth; new exhibitions of good, and new regions of happiness, still expanding and opening to new horizons of divine light and indeterminable splendours.

MAY we then live by faith, and not by sight, and derive peace, happiness and glory on our present, from the prospect of our future state. In all and above all; may the presence, the providence and perfections of the infinite God be the constant subject of your meditations and reverence, your complacency

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placency and love ; as He is in himself the exemplar and assemblage of infinite and inexhausted perfection, and alone can be the never-failing and eternal source of all that is good and great, of all that is lovely, holy and happy to yourself and the Universe of Being.

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DISCOURSE XVII.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 41, &c.

*There is one glory of the sun, and another
glory of the moon, &c.*

IN some former discourses on these words
we considered the contrast or opposition
of things, which contribute so remarkably to
the benefit and beauty of our present system :
we proceed at present to the

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2. SECOND thing proposed to be considered, viz. the gradation or progression of things, from high to low, from little to great; — from the vile to the valuable, and from the mean to the magnificent and important: — An order of things, though not so much attended to as their contrast and opposition, yet not less real or observable, or less expressive of the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Providence.

THE subject is indeed too extensive to be prosecuted at large in this place: we shall therefore content ourselves with throwing together such observations as arise from an easy and transient survey of the works and dispensations of God: and having suggested this train of thought to the reader, leave him to carry it on and apply it to the other phænomena of nature and providence.

EVERY thing in nature is fitted to its place and state: the least things are in their make as perfect, and the most deformed in
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their place as beautiful as the largest, and most ornamented : — these last had certainly had no existence, or at least had conveyed no sense of their beauty and magnitude to us, without the existence of what we term the little, the insignificant and deformed.

As we should not know the essential Attributes of God, his justice and holiness, without the signal and historical characters of them in his dealings with mankind ; so neither could we comprehend his moral attributes of wisdom and goodness without the visible and sensible traces of them in his works of creation : but neither his goodness nor wisdom would be apparent, were the whole system one simple truth, or one uniform good. As man is an imperfect creature, he cannot comprehend good in any other than a comparative or imperfect manner. Some things are less evil than others, or nothing would be to our perception good. Every thing but God is an imperfect good : and he daily draws us to himself by

communicating from less to more, by dispensing light after light, and building our happiness on our misery: the full exhibition of Godhead would at once overpower our feeble faculties, and be more than mere mortality could bear. As naturalists tell us, that too great a quantity of light shakes the nerves so much, as to hinder all distinction of colours; so clear and universal truth, poured upon the mind, would confound all ideas, and obstruct all information. Hence the sparing distribution, as it may seem of good: it is in due proportion to our present powers; and as these are exalted, that will be enlarged. All nature gives suffrage to this truth; and we see through all her works a progression from little to greater, from less to more, from feebleness to strength, from simplicity to wisdom.

It is most agreeable to our conceptions of the Supreme Being, his attributes and perfections, to suppose that he would produce all possible good in the system of the universe.

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If we look down from man to the lowest of the sensitive creatures in the creation, we find good still communicated in proportion to the capacity of the recipients; the number of whom is beyond our comprehension, and greatly expressive of that exuberant goodness, from whence it flows. If therefore we may suppose a system, wherein good can be derived from evil, a greater good from a lesser evil, it is agreeable to our notions of Supreme Goodness, that such a System should exist: for otherwise some good might have been wanting in the world, as God would have been less good than he might have been.

AND let no man say, that God should rather have confined himself to the creation of such free Beings, as he foresaw would use their freedom aright: * for millions of creations may, for aught the objector can alledge to the contrary, exist in the universe. But it extends and enlarges our ideas of the Di-

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* Bates, p. 35.

vine Goodness to suppose all possible good communicated : for let millions of systems of rational and guiltless Beings blaze in warmer and brighter beams of Godhead, and fill an atom of infinite space : yet let the Creator stop his hand, and cease to do good, though in a lesser degree, and he were not infinitely good : (besides that the superior happiness of the higher orders would possibly have been less relished, and consequently less happiness, but for the comparison with less :) strike out but one species of mere sensitive Beings from the present system, and so much must be allowed as detracted from the Divine Goodness.

MAN who has reason, and thereby compares different objects, and collects a preference or meliority, has no admission to the spiritual world ; and is wisely and mercifully debarred from all personal knowledge of the higher order of Beings, their happiness and glory ; while the whole inferior creation lies open to his eyes, and gives him to know the
advantage

advantage of his being and intellectual enjoyments: and what is no less wonderful in the wisdom of Providence, the lowest link of the scale of life is deprived of this reason, that they might not, by comparing and judging, be sensible of their inferiority, and thence miserable and sick of being.

FROM the fall to the restoration of man, God has been graciously working for our happiness, in the only way that was proper to display his goodness, and make us sensible of his mercies. To Adam, Abraham, Moses, and the succeeding prophets were opened light after light, suited to the different exigencies and circumstances of the persons and times; but so that the last dispensation was still an improvement on the former; and at the same time conveyed hopes of still future and greater blessings. We are not capable of absolute happiness, no more than we are of perfect knowledge or sinless perfection. God administers his blessings, as we are able to bear them: he is the foun-

tain of eternal good ; but we are not so capable of receiving as he is of communicating. Our blessings are only withholden, because our nature is limited : as our powers are enlarged, and our natures refined, our pleasures will improve, and our happiness advance.

THE primeval rudeness of most, if not all states, while it left room for, and gave occasion to the vigorous exercise of the faculties of the inhabitants, both for defence in war, and the ornaments of peace, was the subject of complacency to every future age, in the retrospect of their forefathers barbarity compared to their own polished manners, and successive improvements.

THE spirit and resentment that Jacob expressed against Laban, on account of the ill usage he had received from him, in respect to his labours and watchings, his wives and his wages,* resemble the manners and
spirit

Thus I was, In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night ; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

Thus

spirit of his fathers the Patriarchs, and seem chiefly to respect temporary wealth or power: and allowing the patriarchal religion to be true, yet was it low and rude; fitted to their manners, and the nature of things at that time. What we call disinterested virtue and a spiritual worship, were as little known as the longitude, or the use of the needle.

WHEN it is said to the honour of the Patriarch; Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws; it must be understood, and hence appears, that the laws of God were at this time neither of that extent, nor of that strictness, to which they have been since extended by the law and the gospel. The rudiments of duty were fitted to the rudiments of the world.

THE

Thus have I been twenty years in thy house: I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

Gen. xxxi. 40, 41.

The blessings actually conferred upon the people of God, before the law, and under the law, were plainly temporal : hence future generations might be gradually led to expect the divine aid, and acknowledge an Almighty Hand in their spiritual comforts : or was he who gave the one, not able to give the other also ? Is not he “ the Father of spirits,” as well as the Lord of all flesh ? (and did not the promises made to the Patriarchs point out better things to come ?) But to have expected spiritual and heavenly blessings, before any experience of temporal and earthly ones, had been unreasonable ; as man at this time was incapable of relishing them.

THE early ages of the world, Mosaic as well as Patriarchal, were not sufficiently improved to be in general fit for any thing above mere sense ; or however, were more likely to be affected by what was fit to act upon the senses, than what might be addressed to the understanding : the Israelites
were

were too gross to be capable of a religion purely spiritual like the Christian. As the government of families made way for the distribution into tribes, so the Divine interpositions vouchsafed to Israel, and their subjection in Egypt, prepared them for submission to the Divine Law.

EVERY later dispensation of God excels the former, as the trumpet on Mount Sinai is said, “to wax louder and louder;” or, as the commentators tell us it is in the original, the trumpet exceeded itself; the succeeding blasts transcending those that went before. After the commencement of the law the Israelites began to form themselves into a settled government, and became a policed people, eminent for their prowess, their wealth and grandeur, their fame and empire.

THE Prophets rose above the ritual law, and shewed men a more excellent way of serving God, than by relying upon external performances, and thereby prepared their
minds

minds for the reception of the gospel. This was still a higher blessing in the order of progression, vouchsafed by God to man, and was to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of his people Israel." Had this glory been originally and universally communicated to a peopled world of equal faculties as the present; they had not distinguished it from what we call natural, or what might have been judged necessary, a necessary efflux from God, as light from the sun; they had not observed the wisdom of God in the gradual process of means and ends; nor acknowledged his goodness in the distinction between, and the advancement from bad to good, from good to better, from nature to grace, and from grace to glory: they had not been sensible of his holiness in requiring, nor of his mercy in accepting an atonement for sin.

THE Gospel Revelation had been premature before the actual time of its appearance: the history of Providence in former ages could

could not so well have been appealed to : prophecies could not have been completed, had none preceded : the sacrifice of the Redeemer had not seemed fitted to man's wants, and God's method of acceptance, had not the legal sacrifices been long in practice : the Jews wanted no deliverer from spiritual or temporal bondage, while virtuous, and free, and flourishing : and mankind in general had known little use of, or been incapable of understanding a spiritual worship, had not some progress been before made in moral and religious knowledge by prophets, legislators and philosophers.

FROM the inability of man to fulfil the law of works, appeared the expediency of the law of grace : from the imperfection (in this respect) of the first covenant was found a place for the second. God's dispensations open gradually, that each succeeding one may give light to that which went before ; and the proof, as well as the beauty and goodness of Providence, appears from this succession :

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succession : the gospel would have wanted much of its light and authenticity, without the law preceding ; as heaven would shine with less glory, if not the portion of earth-born men. Each future age has been a proof of " God's going forth of old," and we have a surer evidence of the truth of that spirit, which spake by the antient prophets, by comparing the facts with the predictions, than they who had lived in the days of Daniel and Isaiiah : compare the angel's prediction concerning Ishmael and his race with the succeeding history of the Arabs, the denunciation against the Jews with their present dispersion, and let them disbelieve their Bible who can. The temporal blessings promised to Abraham, that he should " be the father " of many nations, and that God would give " unto him and to his seed after him, all the " land of Canaan for an everlasting possession," are but figurative of, and introductory to the higher " spiritual blessings, with " which God hath blessed us in heavenly places " in Christ;" as the outward circumcision of the
 the

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the flesh enjoined him and his seed after him, was but a type of that inward circumcision of the heart, required from all the faithful and spiritual children of Abraham. Thus again, Isaac, in whom God established this everlasting covenant with Abraham, born of a woman, according to the course of nature, past child-bearing, was appointed by God for a sacrifice upon one of the mountains of Moriah, but miraculously delivered, and raised as it were from death to life, was a plain type, and prophecy in fact of that Son of a Virgin, in whom God established a better covenant and better promises, who was laid and bound upon the cross on Mount Calvary, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and raised from the dead by the Almighty power of God.

God by every present, every new dispensation opens the way to, and confirms the preceding : thus all the former divine vouchsafements or declarations given to the patriarchs, to Moses and the prophets, are accomplished and perfected by the coming of the Kingdom

dom of God : the shadows by the light, the figures by the truth, the type by the anti-type, the prophecies by the event, the promises by the effect, the imperfection of the Jewish dispensation by the evangelical perfection, fear by charity, and the law by grace.

JOHN, though the last, was among the greatest, if not the greatest of all the prophets, yet he declares that He who came after him, was preferred before him; that is, greater in his person, his ministry, and the contents of his mission; as Christ declares that the least in the kingdom of God, that is, the least disciple of the new dispensation, was greater, or more a child of God, and entitled to higher privileges and blessings, than John; the law only containing beggarly elements, as they are called by the apostle, compared with the riches, and fulness of the gospel.

AGAIN it is said, that the law and the prophets

prophets were until John," as if their use and authority at this time expired, or were accomplished with his ministry by the coming of Christ. The transfiguration seems to be expressive of this determination of the legal and prophetical dispensations. "There
 "talked with Christ, it is said Moses and
 "Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake
 "of his decease, which he should accom-
 "plish at Jerusalem." The law and the prophets, say the commentators, appeared now in their fullest glory in the death of Christ: and the legislator and the prophet personally attend to appropriate their intermediate missions to this final accomplishment.

THE tabernacle was no longer used after Solomon's temple was built; but was laid aside, as the temple itself was "when the fulness of the time was come." As the sanctuary and tabernacle preceded the temple, so the glory of the latter was to be greater than that of the former, by the appearance of Him who was greater

than the temple. Christ distinguished his mission by more numerous miracles, and by sublimer and more important truths than had been before manifested to the world: and he might with the greatest truth and propriety apply to himself the words that were spoken of him by the prophet, "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."

THUS God's goodness appears in rising blessings, and his wisdom in making lower means still preparatory and subservient to greater and higher instances of mercy.

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I CORINTHIANS XV. 41, &c.

*There is one glory of the sun, and another
glory of the moon, &c.*

FROM the gradation of things, and the progression of the Divine dispensations already observed upon, a few reflections are suggested, which may help to enlarge our conceptions of the wisdom and goodness of God, and of the glory of his Providence.

F f 2

I. THE

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1. THE progession or gradation of things, we may reasonably collect from the history of the past, extends still further, and is connected with the future. And reason and experience confirm the voice of revelation, that where the dispensation of grace ends, the state of glory commences. Yet, preceding this commencement, there is evidently foretold by the prophets a more flourishing state of the Christian church, and particularly a more glorious restoration of the Jewish people, than has yet been accomplished. This, I conceive, is agreeable to that order and progressive perfection, which I think observable in all the gradual and successive dispensations of Providence.

2. YET even the present state of man may possibly extend itself higher, and affect more than man. From the analogy of nature, and the primitive tradition so commonly received by others, as well as the Jewish nation, of divine messengers and ministering angels, it is probable that our world
may

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may have a communication with the world of spirits : to whom our vicious appetites, our low and mean attainments, compared to their own rectitude and perfections, may appear as fordid and insignificant, as the actions of brutes appear to us : as the heavens are not clean, and angels themselves chargeable with folly in the sight of a most perfect and holy God.

FROM reflecting on the generations that are gone and passed away, and on the different communications of good vouchsafed to the different and successive ages of mankind, as well as from the different orders of beings in the known world, we may naturally conclude that the exercise of the Divine attributes is not confined to this planetary world, or to the sole creation and preservation of man its chief inhabitant : or that the dispensation of grace is the last and utmost effort of the Divine benignity.

FROM the analogy of nature, we have
F f 3 abundant

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abundant reason to presume, that the progression observable and carried on from the beginning of time, will still hold on, and know no more bounds than the fulness of infinite Godhead.

COULD any of us look back, and observe the various methods employed by Providence for our preservation here, and salvation hereafter, from our infant days to the last period of life, it would give us infinite pleasure ; and the review would end in admiration of Divine wisdom and gratitude for Divine goodness : in the same manner could we trace back the ways of God, and the method of his dispensations from the creation to the consummation of all things, we should still rise higher in pious gratitude and holy adoration ; as more wisdom would appear in a more extensive plan, and more goodness in larger communications of good.

THE universe is the stage and theatre of God carrying on the whole, and every part,
from

from lesser to greater perfection, and drawing in just measure and proportion all the creatures to himself. Almighty goodness neither slumbers nor sleeps, but is ever labouring to advance nothing into existence, existence into life, life to reason, reason to virtue, virtue to grace, and grace to glory.

THE difference of things in respect of their worth and dignity, which is the subject of our present observation, clearly proves this gradation to be progressive, and extending to other and higher systems and orders of being, than what fall within our knowledge. The general order of the universe needs not indeed be alledged to patronise any supposed irregularity in particular systems : the meanest reptile is perfect in its kind, and fitted with organs and objects suited to its situation. This is to the highest honour of the Almighty, to have shewn the same wisdom and goodness in the whole and every part. Yet man made with a possibility to fall, man actually fallen may be a species of creatures

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in the order of beings, fitted to convey instruction to higher intellects, and superior natures; who from surveying the folly of man, may have a greater relish of their own being, and preserve a deeper sense of gratitude to God for greater favours.

AN ingenious and refined writer* has observed on the beauty of different animals, designed chiefly to please one another in their own species. Now I conceive, a pleasure must arise to man from viewing the deformity of other inferior creatures, compared with his own dignity; as the pleasure of superior beings must arise from viewing the imperfections of those below them. The ingenious writer above quoted seems to be of this opinion, where he observes, that as the beauty of one species of animals may be so designed and adapted, as to give pleasure to many others; so the beauty of different worlds may not be confined to each, but be carried

* Crito, or a Dialogue on Beauty, p. 56.

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carried on from one world to another, and from one system of worlds to another.*

It seems probable to our low capacities, that God acting at all, would act in every possible communication of essence. Created beings of the highest conceivable perfections, being still infinitely removed from the Creator, should seem to require some other standard, whereby to measure their own excellency. Suppose a kingdom of spirits next bordering to the throne of God, and the chain of being there broken off; we may not doubt but that the communications of Deity could make them happy according to his good pleasure: but in the ways of common reason, would they conceive themselves happier with, or without an inferior order? To make this clearer: suppose this chain of being extended from angel to man, and there again interrupted: would man think himself happy, as the lowest class of created beings?

* Ibid, p. 57.

beings? Or, is not his dignity and happiness more considerable, at least in his own eye, by viewing below him a brutal world, and a mass of senseless matter? Say, would a monarch consider himself such without subjects? Or, were the inhabitants of this globe on an equal footing with respect to every natural, and every civil advantage, would there remain any superiority in any member of the society? * Again, let reason be the only principle in man; would its dignity appear to any greater advantage by no passions restrained, no inferior appetites subdued? Descend as low as you please in the scale of beings, I conceive it has its inferior, and a subject-matter of triumph in its comparative excellencies: nor can the Infinite Being be accused in this subordination of his creatures: it is the strongest and plainest proof of his wisdom and goodness: each is happy
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* If I had bestowed honour upon all, no man could have been advanced to honour.

King James's Speech. Rapin, Vol. IX. p. 256.

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in its sphere, and still subservient to the higher happiness of others. The garden is the insect's paradise: man is the lord of the brute creation: angels are principalities and powers when compared to the knowledge and happiness of man.

3. PROPER reflections on the progressive dispensations of God, will perhaps afford us the best answer to the objections, that have been made to these dispensations.

THE rude and licentious manners of some of the patriarchs, and of others who have been styled the servants of God, appear not so enormous and criminal, when we consider the scanty light of Divine knowledge, against which they were committed, compared to that which the Christian enjoys: and little better than savage manners could be expected from men untutored in science, unrestrained by law, and not combined by political society, or arrived at any considerable degree of experience by the history of ages past,

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past. We are partial and unjust, when we condemn any one as criminal for the violation of a law, to which he was an entire stranger.

THE objection against the law of Moses, as unworthy of God, on account of the rites and ceremonies with which it abounded, will appear of little weight, when it is considered that these rites and ceremonies had a peculiar propriety to the times and persons, on whom they were enjoined; and besides were typical of, and preparatory to better things to come. Suppose the gospel had been given us without any interposition of, or connection with, or reference to the law; would it have appeared more credible, or more worthy of all acceptance? Or, should we have had an equal sense of the riches and goodness of God in Christ Jesus, without the weak and beggarly elements of the law objected to, preceding? Or, weak and beggarly as these elements appear to us, blessed as we are with a more liberal and gracious dispensation, would they appear
such

such to the Israelites who were strangers to better light and truth? Or, should not our pious gratitude be the more inflamed by greater mercies than were vouchsafed to former ages? Say, would it become a man in the health and strength of manhood, to object to God the inexperience of his youth, and the cries and tears of childhood?

THE objection made to Christianity from its late and partial promulgation, is so far from impeaching the wisdom and goodness of God, that it serves only to expose the folly of the objectors: for, we ask, are all the blessings of God, or gifts of nature, imparted universally and alike to all? Are we less sensible of the Divine benignity and mercy, after experience had of our wants, frailties and misery! Would light or health be less welcome after suffering long under darkness and disease? Had Christianity indeed been as old as the creation, and prevented all use of prophecy and experience of human reason; would the unbeliever have
therefore

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therefore thought it more reasonable and authentic, or received it as more beneficial or necessary? If grace is to be rejected, because it was preceded by the light of nature, and the dispensation of the law; must we not upon the same principle reject the state of glory, because it succeeds to a dispensation of grace? Thus according to these objectors, our reward is to precede and prevent our labour: the Divine blessings must, it seems, not relieve, but anticipate our wants; and the gifts of God must be denied or rejected, while he has any thing left to give. The folly and impiety of such reasonings and such expectations need not be further urged: only to expose the more the absurdity of the unbeliever on this subject, let us reverse the present order and gradation of the Divine dispensations. Let a state of glory have been the portion of the first inhabitants of the world, and this succeeded by the dispensation of grace: after which let the law take place; and the whole scheme be closed with the rude efforts and barbarism of nature: should

should we have relished this last the more from reflecting on the benefits enjoyed by those who were joined in policy, and directed by law? Or, would these last have thought their privileges the more valuable, by comparing their “carnal ordinances,” their rites and ceremonies with that spirit of light and truth, with which their progenitors had been favoured? Or, should we have considered ourselves as under greater obligations to the Divine mercy, or the means of grace, had we been acquainted with no other state, but a state of glory, that had preceded and passed away? Would a gradation from great to little, from more to less, from life and light to shadows, to darkness and death; would such an order, the reverse of the present, have been expressive of the Divine benignity and wisdom, like a scale of rising blessings, and a process of Providence dispensing light after light, truth after truth, and mercy upon mercy, in such an order of succession, that the former shall illustrate, and commend the latter, and the last be only a preparation

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preparation in the order of progression to future and still greater mercies. Thus the fountain of God becomes a river, which widening as it goes, becomes itself, or ends in a boundless or unfathomable ocean.

4. OUR conduct as men, or rational Beings, and as Christians, ought to be properly influenced, by considering the different orders and degrees of perfection in the creatures, and the various dispensations of God, which have been gradually opening since the foundation of the world.

WHEN we observe the regular subordination of the creatures, their situation, and the provision made for them, according to their several organs and capacities, we cannot but admire the Divine wisdom in this wonderful arrangement. If all is right and regular in respect to the other creatures, we have a strong presumption, that all is right with respect to ourselves, and the generations of mortal men. We are as it were called upon
by

by every creature in heaven and earth, “and
 “under the earth, in the sea and in all deep
 “places,” to be content with the rank we
 hold in the creation of God, and to resign
 ourselves to the disposal of his Providence :
 or are we wiser than God, more gracious and
 more full of compassion ; and better quali-
 fied to conduct the world and its affairs, than
 God himself ? And shall not, or will not
 He who cloathes the lillies of the field,
 and feedeth the young ravens that call up-
 on him, much more provide for you, O
 ye of little faith ?”

BUT something still more than content-
 ment and resignation is due from man to his
 Maker. When we look down upon the
 creatures below us, so much inferior to man,
 in point of reason and rational enjoyments ;
 or when we review the ages and generations
 of mortal men that are passed and gone away,
 or the generations now in being, devoted, as it
 may seem, to ignorance and barbarism, com-
 pared to the light and knowledge we enjoy,

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and which has been imparted to us by the revelation and gospel of Jesus Christ, our piety should be inflamed into the warmest gratitude; and we should love much because we have much forgiven. If we observe the psalmist, the patriarch and the prophet rising to devout raptures, and pouring out their hearts in thanksgivings and songs of praise, from a sense and experience of temporal mercies and deliverances; how warm should be our transports; how elevated our devotion on a prospect of the spiritual blessings, the Divine promises and heavenly hopes, of which we are made partakers by the mission and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. r

IN respect to the Gentile and Jewish world both past and present, Christians stand as it were on higher ground; and see far below them travelling through the vale of life, their fellow-mortals, laden with superstition and ceremony, and frequently wandering out of the way, involved as they were, and still are in clouds and thick darkness.

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ness. But a Christian walks by and in a clearer and a brighter light from heaven: the shadows of the morning, or the more early dispensations of God are vanished at the appearance of "the Sun of righteousness:" as Christians, we live in the advanced and maturer age of religion, and taste more rich and diviner fruits, than were vouchsafed to the infant world, spirit and truth, mercy and grace, righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

NOR is this all: the Christian by the advantage-ground, on which he stands, sees not only the elements and rudiments of the world left far behind; but placed as it were on the extremities of the old world, and on the frontiers of the new, he sees opening to his view the prospect of the heavenly Canaan, blooming with immortal fruits, ineffable in its beauty, and unmeasurable in its extent, crowned with the city of God, enlightened with his glory, and resounding with his praises.

FROM the Christian thus elevated in his situation, and favoured in his circumstances, blessed in the gift of present mercies, and exalted to the hopes of future glory ; something more may reasonably be expected than mere submission, contentment and resignation to the will of God. These were virtues both preached and practised by mere moralists and philosophers. But the Christian is taught both by the history and experience of past dispensations, and especially by the last, which has been vouchsafed from heaven, to consider God in a higher light, and a more exalted and lovely character, than that of a Being of infinite wisdom and power. God is love ; says the Christian Apostle : and in this style let us trace, let us address and adore him in all his works and dispensations. From his going forth of old ; from the birth of time, his work has been, and still is the work of love. He has given, and doth still give in a suitable proportion to the capacities and circumstances of the receiver : his former mercies and preceding gifts are but so many pledges

pledges or preparations for future and greater mercies. Where less is given, it is not for want of abilities in the Giver, but for want of capacity in the receiver : when he spreads darkness, it is but the more to recommend his light : when he sendeth forth his judgments, it is but the more to manifest his mercies. If misery is our portion for a time, it is only that we may be happy for ever : God is in all, and through all, by his various works and dispensations, expressing himself, as I may say, and pouring out from the fulness and exuberance of his benignity, by dispensing light after light, and good after good, and mercy upon mercy, on the several orders of his creatures, rational and irrational. If he gives more sparingly to one species, or one generation, it is that another may be more sensible of his abundant goodness. If he takes away, it is that you may learn to value and relish the more his future and returning blessings. If he wounds, it is that you may see and acknowledge the hand of Him who heals you : if he takes

away the staff of bread, it is that you may know, whose hand it is that openeth, and filleth all things living with plenteousness: if he kill, it is that the power of his mercy may be manifested, in raising you from the dead, to live for ever. Love forms that minim of nature you tread under your feet, or how would men and angels know their superior blessings? It was love that gave the elements of law, and formed or permitted the savage rudeness of nature, and the inordinacy of passion; or how had man experienced or valued the culture of morals, and the still higher blessings of Divine grace and heavenly illumination?

It is love, that through eternity is drawing order from confusion, raising harmony from seeming discord, building strength on weakness, and happiness on the misery of its creatures: love, eternal love shines in the rudest, as in the gayest, in the darkest, as in the brightest scenes of nature; in the still small voice, as in the thunder of Almighty

mighty power : in the tempest, as in the calm ; in the horrors of winter, as in the bloom of spring, or the plenty of autumn. Love, supreme love is infinite and inexhaustible ; and we only question the means, because we see not the end and consummation of its operations : nay we mistake means for ends, and judge of God's essential attributes, and absolute perfections from the first steps of his dispensations, and the detached and unconnected parts of his creation : * love is seen even in our follies, ignorance and impiety ; which serve still more to magnify the Divine mercy in the pardon it offers, and in the wisdom, light, and truth that it ministers to us through Christ Jesus.

HE is styled the “ Alpha and Omega, the “ Beginning and the End : ” perhaps the present subject may mislead us in applying these epithets of Christ, to his being the first great Mover, Instrument and Agent, and the

G g 4

Finisher

* THIS has been Mr. Hume's method, through the whole of his sophistical Essay on Providence and a future state.

Finisher and Perfecter of God's dispensations to man. This however seems sufficiently clear ; that considering the advantages derived to us by Christ, and the "life and "immortality brought to light through "his gospel," we have no reason to expect any further revelation from heaven ; and that according to our order of progression, as the state of grace ends, the state of glory will commence. The means of grace will then possibly appear no better than the ceremonies or types of the law do to us now under the gospel dispensation : and this last may be remembered, if at all remembered, as a law of works, or a yoke of bondage, compared with the happiness of our heavenly habitation : and even this, when reviewed from some advanced period in our future progression to the throne of God, may be no more than the first dawn of the day, or midnight darkness compared with meridian splendor. Such may be the beginning of the days of love and of eternity : and after the experience of millions of ages, spent in
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the enjoyment of heavenly happiness, we may seem only to have tasted the drops, and be yet as it were upon the coast, and just launching forth into the depth of an ocean of infinite fulness and immeasurable extent.

ETERNAL love, slow as it may seem in its steps to us of mortal race, is unwearied in its motions, and inexhausted in its distributions; and as it can never cease to shine, till it ceases to exist, it should never fail to warm us with its present influence, and with the prospect of its increasing strength, and ever-growing splendor.

DIVINE wisdom sees, as well as reacheth from one end to another mightily, and sweetly doth she order all things: and with the Lord a thousand years are as one day. Thus God is justified to himself, (and to whom else is he accountable?) in that causes and effects, the means and the end, the premises and the conclusion, moments and eternity

nity appear in one view to his all-seeing eye: thus the distribution of time, and the succession of days, and months, and years, of nature, law, and grace, the scenes of creation, providence and redemption, though each, and all proper in their time and place, and carrying about them the strong signatures of divinity, may be considered by Him as no more than the rude and preparatory materials, or the mere scaffoldings of our house which is from heaven. We short-sighted mortals are anxious for wealth and title, for fame and empire; while worlds and systems of worlds may appear and disappear as the emmets of a day in the view of an eternal Being: yet supreme love is still justified, while the necessary progression of time is still marked by the progression of perfection in the moral and spiritual world; and the Infinite and Eternal has still an immense and boundless void before him, to be filled up with more shining acts, and fuller displays of Godhead.

BUT

BUT let me presume no further upon this subject : let us rather endeavour to impress upon our minds a proper sense of the Divine Love thus manifesting itself in all the various modes and possibilities of existence : let us trace, let us acknowledge, let us adore the hand of love in every appearance, and fortune, prosperous and adverse, in the ruder lines, as in the fuller draught, in the preparatory steps, as in the advancing perfection, in the parts as in the whole of God's dispensations ; in the moments of time, as in the long day of eternity. Let us bless the God of love, when he takes away as when he gives, when he wounds as when he heals, when he pulls down as when he builds up, when he kills, and when he makes alive : remembering always, that you are in an imperfect state, yet the best and most proper for your present circumstances, a state probationary, progressive, and productive of your future and immortal interest. Thus every disastrous accident will be sweetened; every
step

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step you take will be lightened; and every hour that passes will be gilded, by considering that it is a perpetual advance to your further perfection, happiness and glory.

THE END.

